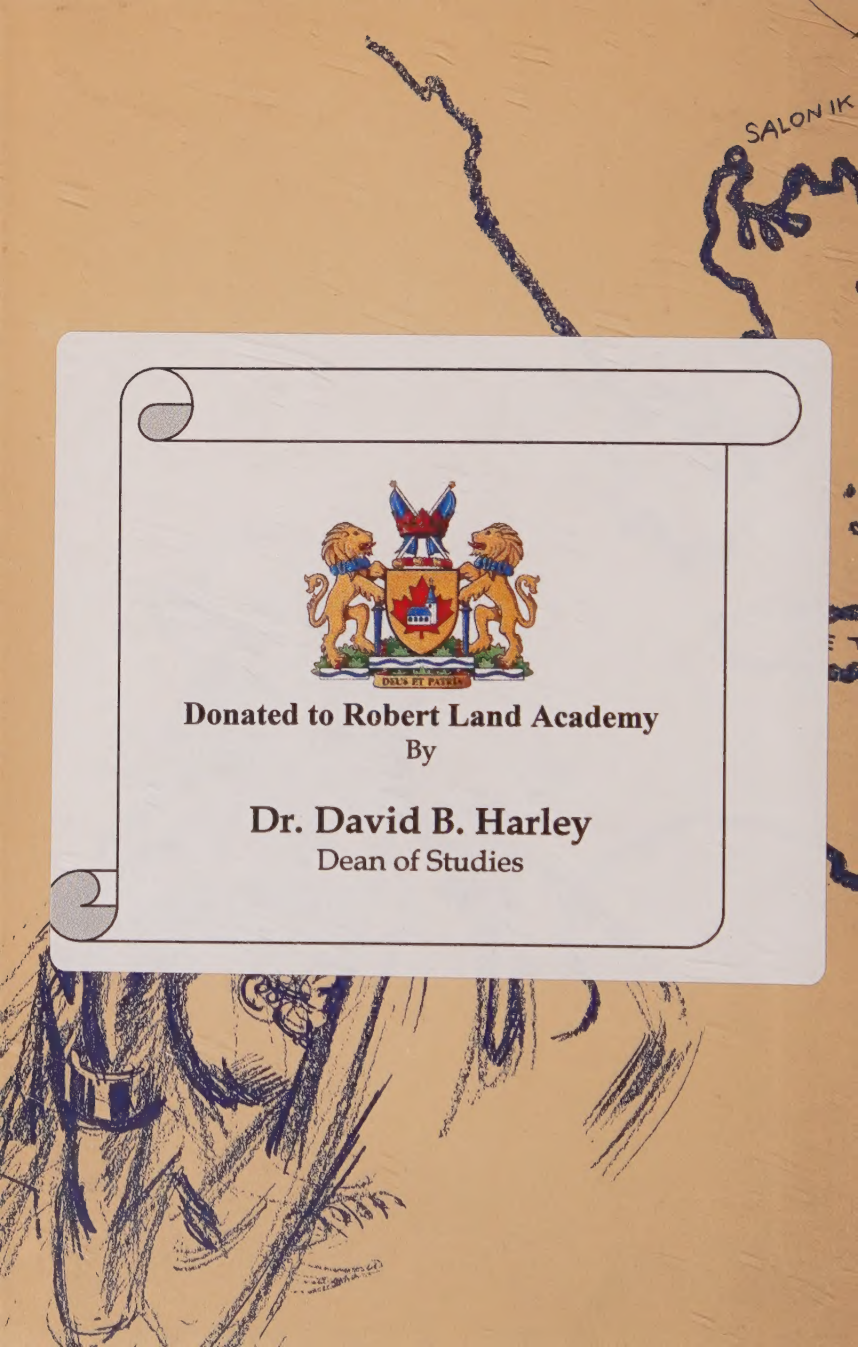

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NORTH OF SUEZ

BOOKS BY

WILLIAM McFEE

ALIENS

AN OCEAN TRAMP

CAPTAIN MACEDOINE'S DAUGHTER

CASUALS OF THE SEA

COMMAND

HARBOURS OF MEMORY

NORTH OF SUEZ

PILGRIMS OF ADVERSITY

PORT SAID MISCELLANY

A SIX HOUR SHIFT

RACE

SAILORS OF FORTUNE

SUNLIGHT IN NEW GRANADA

SWALLOWING THE ANCHOR

NORTH OF SUEZ

BY

WILLIAM McFEE

DOUBLEDAY, DORAN & COMPANY, INC.

GARDEN CITY, NEW YORK

1930

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GARDEN CITY, N. Y.

FIRST EDITION

AFTER THE PRINTING OF
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TO

HELEN

GLOSSARY

CAPITULATIONS, THE: *The treaty under which Britain administered Egypt as a part of the Turkish Empire, paying tribute to the Sultan and guaranteeing the status of the various nationals living in the country.*

TRIBUNAUX MIXTES, THE: *The courts in Egypt to which the various nationals were subject.*

R. N. R. *Royal Naval Reserve. Merchant Service men in the Navy.*

R. N. V. R. *Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve. Special Reserve for the professional men who had had no previous sea training.*

R. N. A. S. *Royal Naval Air Squadron. No longer existing.*

R. N. T. O. *Royal Naval Transport Officer. Officer in charge of all sea transport.*

N. E. O. *Naval Examination Officer. Officer in charge of all neutral merchant vessels.*

R. N. O. *Resident Naval Officer. The senior naval officer of the port.*

M. F. A. *Merchant Fleet Auxiliary. Merchant Service officers on small vessels, but without naval commissioned rank.*

R. T. O. *Railway Transport Office.*

S. O. *Signal Officer.*

M. O. *Medical Officer.*

R. A. S. C. *Royal Army Service Corps.*

V. A. D. *Voluntary Aid Department. Nurses, generally ladies of position, not fully trained.*

WAAC. *A member of the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps. Clerks and stenographers, etc.*

WREN. *A member of the Women's Royal Naval Unit. Clerks, etc.*

C. I. V. *City Imperial Volunteers. A unit organized during the Boer War. Sons of wealthy city merchants.*

I. M. G. *Imperial Merchant Service Guild. Association of masters and mates of the Merchant Service to improve their professional status.*

G. R. T. O. *Government Railway Transport Officer. The Egyptian railways are under government ownership and control.*

AUTHOR'S NOTE

ALTHOUGH projected against a background of the War in a Near East base, and involving a number of military and naval ranks and ratings, together with certain civilian characters, the following story is entirely fictitious.

NORTH OF SUEZ

I

LIEUTENANT STEPHAN RUMFORD was waiting for his wife. He stood at the door of his office, which was one of a suite of rooms upstairs in the Douane, and looked across the Bassin Ismail. The sun was setting behind Port Said. The great Hospital, the Chantiers des Blocs, the repair shops, the salt pyramids set out like tents on the desert, and the long lines of coal lighters, were ablaze before him. The balcony on which he stood was painted gray and overhung the street by the dock gates and the Rue el Tegara. He could see his own shiny launch at the stage. Hassan was squatting on his yellow heels talking to a boatman. Other shiny launches were landing groups of ratings from the ships in the Canal. To his sardonic eyes there was something detestable in the smug respectable demeanour of these men, walking delicately under the eye of the police and soldiers on duty. They would waken him about midnight when they returned from the Arab Quarter, revealing their fundamental baseness in high converse with native boatmen who would insist on being paid before permitting their fares to embark.

Arab boatmen were there now, in their clean nightgowns, with tarbooshes swathed in white scarfs. The lieutenant contemplated them from his balcony. He hated them. In a general way he hated all foreigners. Even those whom he admired he hated fundamentally. The Allies, the French (oh, very much the French!), the Italians (he smiled contemptuously), and above all the Greeks, he hated. This attitude of Lieutenant Rumford

was never revealed to them by word or gesture. He had so much respect for their ability that he never relaxed for an instant his suspicious examination of their movements and motives. Arab boatmen, Arab clerks who worked for Maltese ship chandlers, and Armenian storekeepers were worthy of ceaseless vigilance. He thought, for instance, of Farag, Ranciulli's runner and detective.

He turned, but his wife, who was dressing for dinner, did not appear. He resumed his thoughts. The sun had set while he watched the men pass the gate house. The eastern shore of the Bassin Ismail suddenly assumed an expression of immobility and death.

He hated them all. Even Anastasia Callisthenes, the Greek colonel's woman, who was going to dine with them this evening. The colonel was in London, military attaché to the Hellenic minister. Imagine it! He thought of her now. A black-haired, black-eyed woman of twenty-seven, handsome in a foreign way, with black hairs on her forearms and a dusky bloom on her upper lip. She was like a sword, long, slender, flexible, sharp. Yet Ethel, his wife, said she liked her. "Only decent dago in the place," Ethel had said one day. The child Eleutherios neither of them liked. He was even darker than his parents, with enormous arched brows like smudges of soot, and emaciated yellow limbs.

He turned again. Why was he thinking of the black hair on Anastasia's lip? It was a most unpleasant idea.

"Double up, dear," he said. A word or two came from the apartment behind the office.

". . . not seven yet," she said.

Well, he hated them. This war, which he had known was coming ever since he entered the Cunard Line and

the Royal Naval Reserve seven years before, gave one a chance to size them up. And they had turned out to be very much what he expected. What Lord Nelson had called them. They were not to be trusted.

Not to be trusted! He heard the *slip-slop* of Arab shoes on the stairs leading up to the balcony. The conviction was still glowing in his mind as an Arab youth in a dark blue gown floated round the corner, a paper in his hand. He stopped as his dark treacherous eyes fell on the lieutenant standing at the door, and he cringed a little, but with a scornful irony on his dark face. The front of his vest was heavily embroidered in gold knots. He seemed to Stephan Rumford a hairless womanish creature, in spite of his powerful calves and masculine aura. His expression changed as he divined the thoughts in the lieutenant's mind. He became doubtful of his reception. They knew each other.

He offered his paper and the lieutenant took it away from him with a sudden exasperated snatch. It was a requisition for a hundred pounds of butter, seventy gallons of glycerine, and one hundred zinc plates. For the *Cardiganshire*, a transport discharging frozen beef in the Bassin Chérif. Rumford gnawed his lips as he turned it over. Seventy gallons of glycerine! Two barrels of the stuff! Now what did they use glycerine for on a ship? He scrutinized the signature on the lower corner, "*Approved, Herbert F. Bannister, master.*" H'm. He looked up unexpectedly into the gleaming sardonic eyes of Ranciulli's Arab runner, Ibrahim Farag.

"Get out," he said. "The office is closed. Come for the paper in the morning." He reached into the room and laid the paper on his table.

Farag had retreated as though threatened with phys-

ical violence. Rumford scowled at the dark, voluptuously derisive face. He hated these people with an active hostility. He detested their superb vitality and henna-stained palms, their duplicity and their subtle sophistication concerning the white man's chained desires. He hated the flowers they carried over their ears and the way they trod the Egyptian earth as though it were theirs alone.

He walked into the reception room next the office to get a gin-and-bitters. It was dark in that lofty bamboo furnished and shuttered chamber. He looked into his wife's room. She was nearly ready. She saw him reach for the light and suddenly dash down the bottle of Geneva gin and rush into the office.

"What's the matter?" she asked, coming out at once.

She found him working the combination of the safe.

"Stephan, what is the matter?"

He showed her the requisition.

"A fake," he said. "I know Bannister's writing too well to be fooled. I'll have that Farag and his boss yet. Trying to sneak in and pinch it off the table, seeing the game was up."

"What will you do?" Ethel Rumford went back into the bedroom to get her bag and turn off the lights.

"Ah!" she heard him chuckle.

"Better consult the R. N. O."

Lieutenant Rumford didn't answer. She always said that. He put the requisition into the safe and slammed the door. Always she advised him to consult the R. N. O., Captain Gamble, R. N. As a rule he did. Gamble was his idol. Gamble was his idea of what a naval officer ought to be. But Gamble expected his officers to get along without too much running to teacher. One thing he would not

stand for and that was the written report. No reports was Gamble's mania. He sat behind a huge flat table in a large room of the Navy House, a table on which reposed a telephone and a calendar. He sat there and listened, or spoke into the telephone. Sometimes he strolled quietly into the next room and stood beside the desk of his secretary, while the young paymaster took dictation. Then he would stroll back and sit on his own table instead of in the chair, balancing a ruler and swinging his leg, while an officer made a verbal report. It was Gamble's theory that if the fellows who sent in written reports could all be executed, he could then get on with the war and do something. He regarded a book as a bomb, dangerous and undesirable. Rumford adopted these ideas. He copied the R. N. O.'s mannerisms. After all, he himself, Lieutenant Stephan Rumford, R. N. R., was a resident naval officer too. Resident Naval Examination Officer. And his wife was assistant naval examination officer. She had been his secretary for six months without pay when Gamble, strolling in, made a brief statement. She was to have a commission. The office needed two of them and she knew the ropes. Rank and pay of sub-lieutenant. Enough said. And he asked for tea.

She used to give him tea nearly every afternoon in the reception room while Stephan glared at Arabs, Greeks, Armenians, and Maltese over his desk in the office outside. He was her ideal. He was tall, grave, efficient, with downcast eyes and an impregnable social position. She wished her husband to achieve the same status before the war ended. Only since the war had she realized how important social position could be.

Outside, in the office, Stephan waited for her. She

knew he had bitten on her words or he would have come in to her. She too waited a second before realizing that after all they were married and must work together. This was her discipline. She came out.

She was dark, but in the presence of Mrs. Callisthenes she seemed blonde. She was English middle-class, like her husband, inarticulate and well bred. She dressed in a good taste which was English and made Mrs. Callisthenes, who got her styles from Paris, look like a wanton. She smiled at her husband.

"Why not?" she said to him. Meaning "Why not consult the R. N. O. about those thieves who are swindling the government?"

"Not yet," he said, and waited for her to pass out while he locked the place up.

It was now dark. It was night. The Canal was gone. Shaded blue lights showed here and there on the quay. Port Said was swallowed up until the sun suddenly emerged next morning above the desert and began to blaze into the office of the examination department. As they passed out into the street Stephan decided to wait twenty-four hours before he notified the R. N. O. He took his wife's arm. He felt her respond ever so lightly to his touch. All he wanted in public. They were inarticulate. When she had come out from England, in a Dutch ship, on account of the submarines, and they had been married in the church on the Rue el Tegara (within hail of the Arab Quarter too), and going on to Alexandria for a honeymoon, they had read a book together. Neither of them ever read anything now save the home news and the monthly orders. They had made an honest attempt to read a novel. But they had had to give it up. Couldn't stick it. They kept the book—a popular ro-

mantic novel, but only as a souvenir of the honeymoon. The R. N. O. didn't read much. Neither did Percy Swaffham, R. N. A. S., their dearest friend and best man at the wedding. Some members of the R. N. A. S. maintained Percy didn't know how to read or write. A model officer. Stephan admired him almost as much as he did the R. N. O. Or had done so. Now Percy was slipping. It clouded their inner life to think of Percy. Percy had been in the Cunard with Stephan and his people lived at Aigburth. The Rumfords were at Sefton Park.

These are suburbs of Liverpool, quiet, respectable, middle-class, the antithesis of Port Said. Stephan and Ethel strained in their hearts toward Sefton Park. A semi-detached villa. *Then* they would have children. Not before. Nothing he could bring forward moved Ethel about this. How could she have a child in this dump, with the war on? He agreed and yet . . . He pressed her arm. It seemed part of the texture of their life that the R. N. O. was not married. "Who'd have a mug like me?" he had asked her when they met. They talked the matter over even now, a year later.

Across the Rue el Tegara the shaded bar of the Marina. Just finished and so no dirt, no smell of Arabs, no scandals along the balconies facing the Canal. So far, anyhow. Mrs. Callisthenes and her brat had the room on the north corner overlooking the—what-was-it-they-used-to-call-it *quai?* Quai François Joseph. That old chump, whose mutton-chop phiz was like Stephan's father, a retired skipper of tramps. Emperor of Austria-Hungary. Now remember, Mrs. Callisthenes was dining at their table to-night. Would they have enough potatoes?

War was peculiar enough, Heaven knew, but nobody

would ever have believed that a naval officer would be under the necessity of bringing ashore a brown-paper parcel of spuds and carrying them into the kitchen of the Marina Hotel for the chef to count: seven. Bring them he did, from the *Cardiganshire* that morning. Kindness of Captain Bannister. One of their own sort he was. Were seven potatoes enough for four? That was two each and one for the little dago, Eleutherios his name was. Otherwise the town had no potatoes.

Inside the Marina entrance, there was Bannister, one foot on the rail, as they say in New York, hoisting a Scotch-and-soda.

"And I'll go up and see Mrs. . . ." Ethel, aware of six pairs of eyes above epauletted white uniforms, all turned from the bar and staring through the doorway at her, the N. E. O.'s wife, ran up stairs. The N. E. O. himself went in and shook hands with Captain Bannister.

There was much conviviality going on. The waiters, in fezzes and long nightgowns with scarlet sashes, lifted loaded trays over rapt groups leaning on the bar. One or two men who were not to be trusted even there, Stephan observed. The trouble with men was THEY WOULD TALK! Damn them, damn them. . . . Why couldn't they shut up? No, they had to tell every bloody thing they knew, to every soul who would listen. Watch the couple at the table behind the door! Hands waving like fins, eyes goggling. Of course, it was Balham, third mate of the transport *Hermes*, now at the bottom of the sea. Gabbling to a chum, a new-found chum, of his marvelous experiences. Stephan turned to Captain Bannister.

"I can't to-night. But why don't you dine with us? I

warn you, there are only seven potatoes—the seven you gave me, you know."

Captain Bannister said he had been off potatoes since 1912. The doctor advised it. Cabin biscuit was all he took, soaked in gravy. Or three-days-old bread. He said he would join them if the ladies had no objection.

He was a heavily built gentleman, with a face like the old-fashioned English hunting squires, a High-Church, High-Tory, and Old-Port-for-ever sort of face. He was enjoying the war. Four times a year the *Cardiganshire* was to arrive in Port Said from the Argentine round the Cape of Good Hope and up the Indian Ocean, with six thousand tons of frozen beef. It left him out of subs., mines, raiders, and even cruisers except the *Nürnberg*, and rumour said she was ashore in German East Africa. He ordered two Scotches and a split soda.

Stephan felt in congenial society with this man. His father, he of the mutton-chop whiskers, was the same type. Captain Gamble, R. N. O., was what he, Stephan, was aiming at. This was the pit whence he was to spring to what his wife called "a decent position." He had no intention of being like Captain Bannister when he was fifty. Stephan had what they call an examination brain. He could pass anything if he had a chance to cram. His memory was like a cash register, camera, and dictaphone combined. Faces, facts, and figures, foreign words looked up in the red dictionaries on his desk, were all remembered. Even voices. He could tell a man by his voice heard through a casement. And he meant to climb up over Captain Bannister's head. This war had shown him! It had shown him we were rotten at the top. Those fellows he used to see in the saloon of the old *Lucania*, diplomats, consuls-general, and noble sportsmen off to

shoot Rocky Mountain goats, turned out to be incompetent nincompoops. Now we were up against an enemy that knew what he was doing. He didn't hate these countrymen of his. They weren't worth it, by jiminy! He experienced a sense of outrage at being duped by them so long. Men like Bannister and his father were solid all through. Put 'em anywhere and they would take charge, bringing home the bacon. He knew he could get ahead now. And yet if it hadn't been for the war, he would have ploughed the western ocean, Liverpool to New York and back to Liverpool, until he was a gray old staff captain on one of the big ships, at forty pound a month.

He let Bannister talk. Bannister's conversation was weatherproof, yet he listened carefully. When there came a chance he would discover for good whether that requisition was genuine. Yet how could it be? What would Bannister's ship want with seventy gallons of glycerine? Stephan had passed for extra-master (with his examination brain blowing off at full pressure), yet he was floored now when he tried to remember any ship with glycerine on its indents. He called to mind the *Cardiganshire*. A first-class refrigerated vessel with accommodation for fifty passengers. Bannister, hoisting his third Scotch-and-soda, was chanting the praises of Rhode Island Reds as layers. Bannister's wife reported that they now had forty of them. How did the *Cardiganshire* differ from any other ship? He was mad to think he would have to ask Bannister after all. If he was clever he could think it out for himself. He had no use for those officers who left the engine department alone, as though it were a holy mystery too deep for nautical brains. Bosh! He could trace a pipe with anybody, and his summers on

the old *Pembroke* showed him how steam was raised. Now as for glycerine . . .

He was aware of his wife and Anastasia Callisthenes in the entrance hall. The eyes automatically swivelled over the epauletted shoulders again as he and Captain Bannister went out. Stephan looked at his wife and then at that slender foreign woman. A dago, he and his wife called her in their own room. Yet she was a handsome girl, in evening dress, a black sleeveless sheath for her supple body, her feet in bronze shoes with heels so high and thin they looked like sticks. Her ankles were incredibly fine, he saw. Ethel's were—well, sturdy. You don't marry a woman for her ankles, do you? Ethel was introducing Captain Bannister. And where was Eleutherios, godson of the great Venizelos? Sick? Too much *Rahat Lakoum* from Simon Artz's store. Then there will be seven potatoes for the three of them. They filed into the dining room.

Captain Bannister was to be trusted with women, no matter how fine their ankles. His own wife was a stout person who looked as if she had once been a barmaid, as she had, in Cardiff, before she was married. Bannister was then second mate of the collier *Mountain Ash.* In those days seamen married either barmaids or their landladies' daughters, thus crossing the old yeoman breed with the best commoner blood in England. Stephan's father had married twice—the barmaid had died instead of her baby—the second time, being in command of a steamer, he got a gentlewoman with a little money. *Her* sister, home on leave from her job in St. Petersburg as a governess of little grand-duchesses, became Stephan's fairy godmother, willing her fortune to him

when she died. So he got a Russian name of sorts, hers being Stephanie. Her fortune was in roubles, which looked none too good just now. . . .

But why did Bannister want seventy gallons of glycerine? Well, he hadn't got them yet, and wouldn't unless he had a damn good reason. . . .

Captain Bannister was inviting the girls to tea the next day, on board the *Cardiganshire*. Ethel was interested in the Armenian refugee camp up the canal bank. They would take Stephan's launch and board the *Cardiganshire* on the way back. Stephan listened. They were all enjoying the war. Tea, launches, Armenian lace, cocktails, glycerine . . .

Over in a far corner were two recent arrivals, and Stephan didn't like them. The Marina's dining tables were modern. Each of them had a rose- or orange-shaded lamp so that the diners were illuminated only as far as their bosoms. Faces were in red or yellow shadows. The two men in the far corner were vague. Only the Latin movements of their hands were in view. Damn them, why couldn't these dagos keep their hands quiet? It wasn't only when they were deeply moved. It was all the time: jerking their fingers, spreading their palms, lifting their shoulders. It made him sick. Those two were big black Maltese, the crux of the problem of war in the Mediterranean. Didn't he know? Stephan suddenly saw himself at the nerve centre of the empire's solar plexus contemplating a varicose vein. They were everywhere, in trade, in law, in arms. To be trusted, by Jove, too. And yet, look at those two in the corner. Just as sure as his name was Stephan Rumford, R.N.R., those two were not to be trusted. Yet only last night they were dining with the French admiral. And *he* was the lord-high-execu-

tioner of these parts. Even Gamble, the R. N. O., was under that old Father Christmas. Theoretically, that is. In practice Gamble did what happened to be necessary, and then let Paymaster Georgia, a Maltee by the way, compose formal letters to the Frog, in his native lingo. *Agréez, Monsieur l'Amiral* . . . All that sort of thing. Now what were Gamble's inmost feelings about the French? It would be useful to know. . . .

Bannister was telling a story of his experiences at the time the war began, in the Cameroons. Dinner in the saloon of the *Cardiganshire*. Three bearded butterfly catchers, bug hunters, on their way to read papers to scientific meetings in London. *Der Tag* had arrived. Bannister's big winey voice boomed and chuckled as he took off those German professors caught in a tropical port, jungle behind them, British in front, when Namur was falling. Bannister was enjoying the war. Skippers enjoy everything except groundings and collisions. Stephan marvelled that he had never seen this before. It was a life beyond life. You gave a decision now and then, otherwise it was *carry-on*. Tradition, company's rules, rules of the road, port authorities, international code, quarantine, all arranged your life. And yet Stephan had no intention of following his father or Bannister. No fear. He had other fish to fry. He looked again at the two strangers. They had come into the office one day and had stood silhouetted against the morning light. Introduced by Mister Ranciulli, the dean, the doyen, the grand-master of ship chandlers of the Sinaitic Peninsula. "This is Mister Cassar and this is Mister Mifsud. A-hoom! Entering the shipping business here, Lieutenant. Just come in on the Pee-and-Oh!" How that old fraud blared out his vowels!

Well, they were in the shipping business already. They had a ship and so far . . . h-m. They had arrived from Malta on the *Kaisar-I-Hind*, a ship now at the bottom of the sea. He, Stephan, knew that we had nobody to blame but ourselves for that. Captain Newberry of the *Kaisar-I-Hind* was fifty miles off the course he, Stephan, had shown him on the chart. People at home were wanting to know how it was a destroyer was always a few miles off a torpedoed ship. Why the devil can't the destroyer get the submarine before instead of after? So the papers snarled. The reason was, the destroyer was on the course, the ship was not. Simple, but not simple enough for a taxpayer to grasp, damn him. Yes, these merchant skippers didn't like to be given orders when they'd made a certain course for twenty years.

Messrs. Cassar and Mifsud over there, shovelling spaghetti into their moustaches, were in the shipping business now. A French coasting steamer of eight hundred tons. They had paid fourteen thousand quid for her and her first voyage—to Salonika and Corfu—bringing back a cargo of Turkish tobacco, had netted them seven thousand, in spite of engine trouble and a leak spoiling a hundred bales. So the rumour ran round the Custom House. Now, thought Stephan, lifting the cover of the dish and counting his potatoes, what was the use of being at war when the dagos made all the profit? *He* wouldn't be allowed to charter or buy a ship and make a bit like Cassar, Mifsud & Company. Oh no! It was the white man's burden. We had to protect those big black bounders while they rolled up a fortune. They weren't even war-taxed. Could you beat that? Yet conchies at home yelped that the British oppressed small

nations. Whereas anybody in the services knew we were breaking our backs to hold up the roof while Maltees, Armenians, Syrians, and Copts scuttled along with their arms full of loot.

Mrs. Callisthenes was smiling at him. She was infernally handsome in a not too moral way. Did he like dark women? Ethel was dark. That was to say, she had black hair and brown eyes. But this Greek woman was darker than that, much darker. And he had no idea what was in her mind. The censor, Angus MacTaggart, had told them she was an aristocrat in her own country, an old Cretan family. Like Venizelos. Their kid was named after the great man. Her husband had been governor of one of these two-by-four islands in the Ægean. Now he was a military-attaché in London. He wished his wife to be safe, so left her in Egypt. They were having visits from Zeppelins in London. Somehow she reminded him of Cassar, Mifsud & Company. Same thick black hair on the forearms, same brilliant black eyes, same impression that if the Boches were here she would be palling up with them, as she was now palling up with the British and French. Not to be trusted. Neutrals. They had to be watched.

Suiting the action to the thought he looked up and watched her. Mrs. Callisthenes was a clever woman. Each year she had been in the habit of visiting Paris for a month, living in a discreet family hotel in the Rue des Capucines, close to the Opéra. Her friend, her *bien-aimé*, was killed in the first month or two of the war. For a year she had been the devoted mother, the Venizelist patriot, the interesting grass-widow in hotels in Alexandria, Cairo, Port Said. She and Stephan had been at the Continental, down on the beach, and she had marvelled that

the man seemed unaware of her. The explanation was, he was engaged to and waiting for Ethel at the time. It was Lieutenant Swaffham, R. N. A. S., whom she disliked, who had introduced them.

Anastasia Callisthenes was well aware of the reasons why Ethel Rumford had taken up with her. Better than Ethel herself, who had never had a lover, had never been engaged to any other man, and who was Sefton Park in Port Said. Anastasia was aware of her now, in full tide of happy conversation with a man who might have been her father, Captain Bannister of the *Cardiganshire*. Aware of her; but for a flashing split second her black sensuous eyes shot a look into Stephan's across the rose-tinted shadow above the lamp. Ethel was leaning forward, her bright agreeable face illuminated. And Stephan, beginning to eat, found his thoughts all in a milling chaotic swarm at the back of his mind.

His thoughts didn't stay out of reach long, however. Curiously, they centred upon his old shipmate Swaffham, a wing-commander now, who had been slipping. After that glance of Anastasia's Stephan wished to know why, if the poor old chump was going to fall for a dago woman, didn't he catch on to Anastasia? He had had her all to himself for a week at the Continental. Yet he had mumbled an introduction on the first occasion after Stephan moved off H. M. S. *Superb* into the hotel. Most taciturn chap in the service, Swaffham. Coming back from a flight into Syria a photographer behind him, a handsome loquacious business man from Cricklewood, was asked whether anything unusual happened when they had to land, repair an aileron and take off again, tribesmen galloping furiously on the skyline. He had said, "Rather. Swaffham spoke three words without

stopping." That was Swaffham. Three words edged out of closed lips. On the *Lucania* he used to be the same. Well, instead of having an affair with a high-bred woman who was worth getting into hot water for, what was he doing? Why, he was said to be spending all his time between flights hanging round a Maltee chemist's daughter. The Merola girl.

What was there against her? Not a thing. It was only gossip that Swaffham was infatuated. Nobody had seen her out of her parent's sight. All the same, one doesn't want one's old friend and brother-officer bringing a Maltee piece over to Sefton Park to dinner. Better, far better, this one here. She was a lady. A ladye fayre, as they used to put it. A beauty, if you liked them very dark. There was an old ballad:

The Kynge of Spayn is a foul paynim,
And liveth on Mahound,
And pity it were that ladye fayre
Should marry a heathen hound.

MacTaggart had shown Stephan that in a book. The censor was a bookish chap. He would talk Platonic Greek to a cab driver in Alexandria and roar with laughter at the fellow's reply. Still, the poem didn't fit after all. The lady wasn't fayre, and the pity was that there were no unmarried Englishwomen, except nurses, in Port Said.

Poor old Swaffham. Lieutenant Commander of the Royal Naval Air Squadron, known to derisive merchantmen as R. N. A. S., Really Not A Sailor, was practically inarticulate under all conditions. He had taken to the Merola family lately and the only explanation of that was Violetta, who sat in the cash desk of Papa Merola's

"English Chemist" shop on the Rue du Nil. She was a juicy, sloe-eyed little piece, and was supposed in Port Said gossip to be frantic about hooking an English officer. Gossip also stated that Swaffham was hooked. Ethel was severe about this defection of Swaffham. As Stephan's old shipmate on the *Lucania* he was supposed to be Ethel's devoted slave. According to Sefton Park. Or at least he might have had a love affair (extremely honourable) with Anastasia Callisthenes, confiding in Ethel.

The salad was escarolle, dangerous with typhoid near by, and the dessert was a water ice. *Sorbet des Alliés.* Oh God, what a compliment from the management! And fruits. Old Bannister offered his cigar case as the Egyptian coffee, black like the eyes of Mrs. Callisthenes, was offered by an old bearded ruffian dressed up with a dagger and pen-box thrust into his sash. England would be full of Egyptian coffee sets after the war, brass trays, seven-and-six each at Simon Artz's store, ten shillings to tourists. Also dinner gongs and flower vases made out of six-pounder cartridge shells. That was what war was for. As he looked round the room and expelled the first smoke of Bannister's Havana, Stephan thought that not a man or a woman in the room had any conscious obsession about beating the enemy. It was this feeling which made Stephan feel solitary in the world except when he was with the R. N. O. or MacTaggart. Even Ethel took the war in a social way. And yet if people didn't have it burning inside them, how *could* we win? They were "going out into the night," as they said in the plays. Ladies first. Bannister was speaking to a friend in the bar. Oh, of course; the ladies would be down in a second. Little Eleutherios must be inspected.

Stephan, by the door, looking into the white piquet-covered cap to make sure it was his, found himself surrounded, as it were, by Messrs. Cassar and Mifsud.

They loomed over him, half a head taller than he, deferentially overwhelming, regarding him with tremendous consideration.

"Captain, we have a little business proposition——"

"I'm not a captain."

"Lieutenant, the fact is—a matter that won't wait. We must have a survey on the *Alceste*, our ship."

"What's that to do with me?"

"We would appreciate your attention, Lieutenant, if you could act for us as a surveyor."

"Why don't you go to the French?"

The two deferential heads sank into shrugged shoulders.

"They would insist on spending so much for repairs there would be no profit. They—— But it would be better to speak in a more private place, if you please."

Just what Stephan was thinking. These two men standing about him, close up, importunate, in their distress apparently sincere, were embarrassing. He refused to accept even a box of cigarettes from a merchant. They should have no hold on him at all. He had told Ethel his opinion about this. Necklaces of amber, Sudanese copper bowls, cigars, chocolate, Turkish delight, Maltese lace and all the junk of the bazaars, went back the moment they showed up at the office. No hold on him at all. He would like to loot their damned stores, but he would accept nothing. He saw that once the bars were down these weevils would be all over him. They would turn nasty. He would have to wink at more than an extra ton of coal

or a barrel of oil sent ashore in the laundry. He looked up the stairway, into the bar, gnawing his lips.

"I shall be in after ten o'clock," he said irritably. "And in future don't discuss your business with me in hotels."

"We understand, Captain—Lieutenant. We are very grateful. Ten o'clock."

"After," he called out as they bore down upon their table again.

Bannister might want to come up for a peg. He'd had enough, really; but anyhow he would be away before ten. Stephan, picking his way along in the darkened street, heard Mrs. Callisthenes laughing in his ear. It was incredible. Those two white figures in front were Captain Bannister and Ethel, and he had hold of Anastasia's arm. She blended into the night. He could see nothing of her, not even her eyes; but he was aware of her perfume and the firm electric resilience of her flesh. What did she say, in her funny English? It was like, it was like a stream rippling over its bed. Music. He remembered a vacation, home from sea, the time he passed for extra-master, and felt king of the world. He had gone to the lakes, and, lying in his bed in a hotel at Ullswater, heard the song of the stream going past his window. He had had dreams of astonishing power and beauty as he lay there, and he had them now. He looked up at the serene sky dusted over with brightness and another of MacTaggart's things came to him:

And on His grave, with quiet eyes,
The Syrian stars look down.

MacTaggart had gone to Cairo to battle with the High Commissioner over the enemy mails pouring through

Egypt to East Africa. Imagine it! Under their damn noses. MacTaggart had shown them to him. The voice at his ear made him dizzy. She seemed, as they entered the deeper shadow of the Douane, to hold him back, to press nearer to him.

Ethel's voice sounded across the yard behind the Douane, clear and cool, like a brilliant young schoolmistress addressing her class.

"Stephan, you have the key, dear, I think."

At his ear the musky music of an alien heart. . . .

"*My life iz waste, in zis place.*"

He answered, "That's right. I've got it here," and said to himself, "*I'm a bloody ass. They're coming at ten. The* Alceste *is a wreck.*"

Her fierce eyes saw the two white shadows turn the corner at the top of the stair, and with a sudden movement as he sought to make way for her she ascended the first step and turned to him. He was aware of the perfume of her bosom, his face was pressed against her splendid wanton breasts, and for a moment he swung into a delirium of desire.

And of course, as he walked with dreadful jauntiness up the stairs, calling to his wife :

"What are you two doing up there?" and hearing her merry cymbal-voice replying:

"What are you two up to down there?" another of MacTaggart's Golden Treasury Notes floated through his brain:

Who is the Happy Warrior? Who is he?

They came into the full glare of the balcony light. Ethel had found the switch.

"Here, put that out!" he snarled. He was himself again. "Sorry, Ethel. But it shows halfway to Jaffa." The question, once they were sitting in the reception room, with one shutter open toward the Marina and so invisible from the sea, was this: *Was* he himself again? He seemed—to himself—to be changed. He stared straight at Ethel. He wasn't afraid of his wife. But was it possible she was unaware of his potential infidelity? They had known each other since he went into the Cunard —took each other for granted. He had been a sailor, she a sailor's sweetheart. But he had never had a wife in every port. He had never had a wife in any port. She was his one woman, and here he was, staring at her as she talked easily and amusingly to her guests, setting out cigarettes, chocolates, and hurried out in an apron to get ice, and wondering why on earth she couldn't *see* what had happened.

Anastasia stood on the balcony outside the open shutter. No fear! He wasn't going out there, anyway. Captain Bannister sat benignly in a creaking bamboo chair, slightly jingled. Stephan drew up a stool.

"Captain Bannister, do you use a great deal of glycerine on the *Cardiganshire?*"

"Certainly we do. We have hydraulic cranes instead of winches."

Stephan got up and strode up and down. He snapped his thumb and finger. Now why couldn't he have thought that up for himself? Of course, of course!

"Seventy gallons?"

"What do you mean by seventy gallons?" wondered the captain.

"You approved a requisition for seventy gallons of

glycerine, a hundred pounds of butter, and a hundred zinc plates."

"When was this?" The old hunting squire's face lost its benignant smile. Stephan went out and brought back the requisition. Captain Bannister put his glasses on his nose and got the paper into focus. He looked up at Stephan, shook his head, and handed the thing back.

"Just what I thought. Now don't say a word about this. I'll attend to Mister Ranciulli."

Captain Bannister shook his head again.

"Ranciulli wouldn't do a thing like that."

"It's his paper."

"It's my signature; but it wasn't written by me. Get away with you! I know Ranciulli. Got a couple of fine daughters."

Ethel came in with the ice, and Stephan put the paper back in the safe. Old Bannister was a bit stewed, but he was probably right about Ranciulli. It was too raw altogether. Then it was Farag himself. That was more likely. Ibrahim Farag spoke English a damn sight too well. Moreover, Stephan had always had his suspicions about Master Farag ever since he had heard that story of him being expelled from the American Mission in Alexandria. Which showed how the human mind was only half awake, because when Commander Hickerson mentioned it Stephan's memory retained it but left it, as it were, unpacked in the storeroom. Now he saw the point. The next thing to do was to discover what ship, supposing all that glycerine, zinc, and so forth had been released, would it be sent to. Stephan saw he had moved too quickly. Farag was "gone away," as they said of a fox, which he resembled. The R. N. O. would say noth-

ing, but he would think a hell of a lot, if he found out what a fool his examination officer had been.

Still, let's try some ratiocination. Farag would hardly know of himself that the *Cardiganshire* would reasonably requisition glycerine. Not one ship in a hundred had hydraulic cargo gear. It wasn't a success in a general way, and engineers loathed it. Where would he get that information? Asking oneself a question like that, in Port Said, was like jumping over a cliff in the dark. You dropped into oblivion; a void, bottomless and interminable. Then the only thing to do was to get hold of Ranciulli, who would probably protect himself and his business by denying everything.

Stephan, wiping his face with his handkerchief, talking to Bannister, drinking Scotch-and-soda, watching Mrs. Callisthenes light a cigarette at the end of a long amber stem, sighed. These were the times when he wished they would put him on a ship. God! Think of the peace of being on a battleship in the North Sea; nothing to do but keep his watch, carry out orders, and when the time came, get blown to blazes or watch a gray shape on the horizon give a sudden red spurt as her magazine caught fire! Or in a destroyer, rolling rails under at thirty-five knots, loosing off death at men as good as himself, with the same passions inside them except that they couldn't understand how people who live in an island feel about a navy. He sighed. In the office he was fighting an enemy who never materialized. He was in the thick of a dirty swirl of cold-blooded mongrel plotting. They were all crooked in this country. It was their revenge on the French and British for hauling them out of savagery, beating them over the head with school books, law books, and sanitary codes, hoisting them by the slack of their

baggy pants into an erect human position instead of grovelling in their Nilotic mud. Slaves they were! This was their revenge, that to cope with them you had to become like them inside their heads, and when you did that the danger was close. It seemed to him he was being beset by devils. Not the devils of the story books; but good-looking handsome devils with check books; a devil with musky music in her throat, and flesh so damnably alive it made him faint to think about it; devils in blue gowns and fezzes, whose scornful eyes were aware of our sleepless chained desires.

Bannister was putting his hands on the arms of his chair. He was going. "Hassan might be about, Captain. We'll find him. It's a long pull over to the Chérif Basin. Tell you what. This place is an oven with the shutters closed. We'll take you over. Give us a breath of fresh air. I'll find Hassan."

Stephan went out and down to the dock. The sentries saluted. Row boats with tiny candles in tin boxes below the thwarts bobbed in the darkness. Over the water faint blue gleams showed where ships' gangways sloped. Red and green side-lights moved stealthily back and forth. It was as though spirits of various social position out there awaited transport in these glowing barks to the dark shore of the Beyond. The lieutenant called:

"Hassan! Are you there, Hassan?"

"Yes Sah!" A voice came from under the low shed where long sailing boats were drawn up for security. Hassan hurried.

"Make ready. We go to the Chérif Basin."

Stephan turned and looked up at the face of the Douane. On the balcony stood a figure in black. She was there, then. What does a man do in a case like this?

Stephan tried to imagine himself making a written report to the R. N. O. on the subject. Then the fat *would* be on the fire. They would send him home as a nervous-breakdown case. Those who didn't like him—and you could man a cruiser with them—would roll up their eyes and make the motion of a man drinking. And yet, joking aside, the very fact that made a man a man, made the world worth living in, made the war a matter of life and death—that very basic fact lurked behind his present predicament. The shadowy form on the balcony was like an impending destiny, with those two men, Cassar and Mifsud, arriving at ten sharp. He brought his wrist up to his eyes. The radiolite hands of his watch showed him he had half an hour before the devil came for his soul.

Yes, he'd be a nervous-breakdown case, like the fellow in a mine-sweeper who followed thirty-six hours' sweeping with twenty-four hours in the Arab Quarter, living on caviar sandwiches and Turkish delight washed down with Greek mastic. When he started going to sea with a broom at his mast-head they put him in the hospital for a while and then sent him home by what Ranciulli called "the Pee and Oh!" On the *Kaisar-I-Hind*, to be sure, and he was one of the saved.

Women had no sense of fair play. She would kiss Ethel good-night without the flicker of an eyelash. There she was at the end of the balcony. When he passed out into the street the reflection of the light against the Marina's new cream-coloured walls would show her to him. No sense of fair play. All this was sweet to the animal soul of a man, whatever his immortal soul might feel about it; but he wanted her to let him alone. She was a huntress and he was plunging through jungles of

dago duplicity and Arab rascality with a desperate wound in his side. He tried not to look up. He looked up. She was leaning on the balustrade. *Oh, Serpent of Old Nile!* MacTaggart again. Then it wasn't anything particularly new, this trick of stealing another woman's man. It was new to him, though. He hurried. He felt that, if she came down the dark stairway to meet him, he would strangle her on the spot. Now . . . now! Steady, the Buffs! No; she had gone back into the room.

Nevertheless, his evening was not over. It was a ten-minute spin to the *Cardiganshire* and ten back to the dock. Left him five minutes to escort Mrs. Callisthenes across to the Marina before those men came about the *Alceste*, who was certainly destined for the lower world, Davy Jones' Locker, if some Hercules didn't rescue her. A wreck she was. If a war wasn't on, nobody would take a chance on her. He kept his thoughts on the *Alceste*, poor thing, while they went down and got into the sputtering launch; but what was the use when Anastasia's hand, as she stepped over the gunwale, gave him a terrifying vertigo. Ethel's steadied him. It was friendly, neutral, insulated from the current of her life like a rubber glove. Ethel was Sefton Park on an autumn evening, the fire burning in the front room while he hurried home from his office in Water Street. "Well, dear!" and a cool kiss. Perhaps, if he got on and went to London, they would press hands slightly, as the polite world does.

That was Ethel's ambition. He must leave the sea. A ship's officer was nothing. A *naval* officer, of course, was a great deal. If he got into the navy and wore half-inch lace on his sleeve instead of the intertwined Naval Reserve lace (now being imitated by Marconi boys on

tramps, so that R. N. warrant-ratings had been known to salute them by mistake) she would be content. But her heart was set on a business career. She it was who had suggested that he could make connections now in Port Said with influential firms, so that *when* the war was over he could secure a good position. With a decent screw.

When! If we didn't pull up our socks and tear into them they would be down into Salonika, across the Canal and in the Channel Ports. And we wouldn't have a ship left except the French, whose whiskered admirals knew a thing or two. That was one way to have the war over, with the Kaiser riding through London on a milk-white charger. . . . Stephan's thoughts skidded to a standstill at this. That wasn't possible, he supposed heavily.

Anastasia would never say, "Well, dear! Had a good day?" What *would* she say? Here his knowledge failed him. Men like Stephan, monogamists by birth, training, instinct, and marriage, are tragic victims of a woman's hunting for sympathy and understanding. Monogamists understand nothing. They have sympathy only for themselves. They are unintelligent saints tempted in spiritual deserts. They are poor sports, who blame everything on the woman, never realizing the fact that it is a sport. They know nothing about women and less about themselves. They are the framework of government; secular fanatics; sulky Josephs running off and leaving their souls in the grasp of Potiphar wives.

Stephan was about to run off. As Captain Bannister lunged and caught the hand-rail stanchion of his own accommodation ladder, preparatory to swinging onto the grating, Stephan moved over away from Anastasia to balance the launch. He grasped the tiller firmly. Ethel

was in a gentle drowse. Ethel always got sleepy halfway through the evening. He kept his eye on the red and green lantern in the bow of the launch. He was not above praying to God to strengthen him in a crisis like this. Surely God would help a man to go straight. "*Not after He's made him,*" said MacTaggart one day, during a discussion of the revival meetings in the tent down near the sea. Rather a deep answer, Stephan thought, if it meant anything at all. One can't argue about these things. You feel God inside, same as you feel *For King and Country.* The Germans felt *Gott mit Uns* and *Deutschland Über Alles.* Let 'em come and get it! Stephan's heart flared in his breast for an instant. A man can be too intellectual nowadays. It is only natural to stick up for and fight for your own kind. If that were the only trouble, how simple war would be! The chaps in the trenches had Germans in front of them, French on the right. They knew where their enemy was and could strafe him. But here, Maltese, Copts, Armenians, Syrians, Berbers, Sudanese, Italians, Greeks, Turks, Abyssinians and Hebrews, to say nothing of the Capitulations, a High Commissioner, a runaway Khedive, a Sultan, a Financial Adviser, and French control of the Canal. It turned your brain to think of it. Here was the dock, and nobody had said a word. Salute. A fireman from a transport, drunk, full to the guards as they say, hung by the iron railings outside. Or *was* he drunk? Stephan flung a word at the sentries and ran toward the man, whose arm was reaching through the bars to take something from a hand in the shadow of the long boat house.

"Hi, stop that!" he called, like a boy on the side lines of a football game. The drunk moved off with gathering speed—and the glow of the Marina front no longer

illuminated him—Stephan in pursuit, the two women rooted to the spot, in consternation. They heard Stephan running in the dust down past Cook's old office, a shout, a curse, feet scuttering into the distance and Stephan returning carrying a parcel. His eyes were bright, one side of his face scored with sand and bleeding.

"Stephan!" screamed Ethel.

"Nothing. He shied the thing at me and it was all covered with sand. I expect it was dropped getting out of the boat. See that?" he showed the parcel. "A hundred pounds sterling wouldn't buy it here. Hashish. I've seen that chap before. He's an Arab, pretends to be a drunken Britisher."

The sentry was standing at attention and Stephan stopped to look at him. A wooden expression on the man's face. Eyes front. M-m well, good-night, Mrs. Callisthenes. Across the street to the hotel, Ethel walking down the Rue el Tegara in the gloom. What Mrs. Callisthenes could do she did in the second of farewell. A destroyer, going out, blared briefly on its siren *whoopee-whupp!* to warn the guardship's pinnace coming from the hospital. What was that? To-morrow evening she was going for a walk on the mole. The siren made her jump, he saluted and hurried away. Now for Cassar and Mifsud. All the same, he was going to sniff round that sentry. The beggar probably was in the game. He, Stephan, had capsized things by rushing ashore at an inopportune moment. Phoo! That sprint had winded him. He was out of condition. Would have to start morning exercises again. And his face was smarting with the grit from the parcel. Nearly two okes of hashish! Quite a tale to come to the provost marshal's ears by way of Navy House! Our men were being de-

bauched right and left with this infernal habit of drug-taking in cigarettes. They got so they simply didn't care a damn whether you jailed them or shot them. A fine uproar had come from G. H. Q. in France when a contingent from Egypt was found to be rotten with dopers. And here were two okes of the stuff—say five pounds—enough to besot a regiment for a month!

Ethel clicked her tongue when she saw his face and went at once for hot water and a sponge. He put the parcel in the safe, and turned to find Messrs. Cassar and Mifsud in the doorway. "Come in, come in! Fell down getting out of a boat; hurt my face. Wait in here till I get some vaseline, will you?"

"Don't tell anybody about this," he said to Ethel as she bathed his face. "Nobody saw us except the sentry. Not a word."

"Better consult the R. N. O., dear," she said gently, and he sank into one of his enigmatic silences. Then he repeated what he had said to the two men outside.

If they imagined Lieutenant Rumford had been stewed when he fell down, they were soon undeceived. His bruised cheek and jaw shining with vaseline, he waved them into the office, closed the doors, switched on the light and sat down in the chair behind the desk.

The two big moustached men drew up two creaking cane-bottomed bentwood chairs and looked at him with profound solicitude in their eyes, like two grand opera vocalists about to begin a duet.

It was that. The *Alceste* must be surveyed and the lieutenant, they had taken the trouble to discover, was highly qualified to do it. Asked where they found that out, the two gentlemen from Valletta told the simple truth. The salvage officer at Senglea, which is the dock-

yard across the Grand Harbour, had mentioned Lieutenant Rumford's name. Lieutenant Crossley was his name. Stephan looked suddenly from one to the other. He had been making marks on a piece of paper, an "A," an "N," another "A." Crossley, was that the Crossley who was port captain's assistant in New York? Well, it was decent of Crossley. He ought to have three stripes though. He added an "S" to the marks on the paper. Very decent of him. It made these fellows seem genuine. Had they—but of course an officer couldn't give it to them in writing. Mr. Mifsud, however, handed over a card—*Mr. Hamilton Crossley, R. N. R.*

Mr. Cassar went on to explain that the French wanted to charter the *Alceste*, or were willing to charter her, to carry petrol to Salonika from the refineries at Suez. Offensives were continually being held up by shortage of fuel for the aëroplanes. Attempts to carry small quantities on the decks of transports were not very successful. They needed a reserve. The *Alceste* would carry twenty thousand five-gallon cans. But she needed repairs, and a survey by a competent person to satisfy the admiral was imperative. Now what they proposed was that the lieutenant act in that capacity, and they would be glad to recognize his services in any way he cared to suggest. Up to a hundred guineas. . . .

"No," said Stephan, putting a "T" and an "A" on the paper. "I'll survey your ship; but I'll do it for the sum of one piastre tariff. Two pence ha'penny. You understand that it would be a bad precedent. It would tie my hands. I can't allow anybody here to feel I owe them a favour. But you can send a check to the church canteen if you like." He added an "S" and "I" and a final "A" to his paper and began to rub it out at once.

They became volubly protesting, and then Mr. Cassar, leaning forward into the light, said that they could understand the lieutenant's scruples but nevertheless it was impossible for them to accept his services unless they made some sort of acknowledgment. However, they agreed not to embarrass him *personally*. Would he make an appointment the next day?

He said he would. So long as he had escaped the transfer of money he felt relieved. He said they could give Mrs. Rumford a piece of Maltese lace. She would appreciate it. They looked at each other significantly.

"We will give her a present, Lieutenant. It would be an honour if she would accept some little thing."

"Well, be sure it is little," said Stephan. "I'll look over the ship to-morrow. You may need all your ready money to get her in condition."

When they had bowed themselves out he turned to the large-scale map of the eastern Mediterranean which hung on the wall and meditated. What a kettle of queer fish! His eyes followed the course of ships through the Dodecanese, across the Cyclades, into Salonika and eastward past Lemnos to the Dardanelles. Failure everywhere at that time. The Turks seemed stronger than ever. The Palestine front remained shaky, much too close to the Canal. The French seemed able to do nothing at sea. They sat there in that Byzantine Canal Building and wagged their beards. Three months since those Japanese trawlers had arrived and the Frogs hadn't got them ready for mine sweeping yet. Meanwhile our chaps were going blotto with loss of sleep doing double shifts. *Aux armes, Citoyens!* Looked like it! The telephone tinkled. It was the Navy House private wire. The R. N. O.

"Yes? Lieutenant Rumford speaking."

He listened, gnawing his lips. It gave him a feeling of security to think that the boss was there, on the job. He counted them. The R. N. O., MacTaggart, Beecham, the transport man, and the engineer-captain. While the rest toiled, made love, got drunk or died. He and those men on this private wire knew. "Yes, sir?"

For a few seconds he listened with features set and eyes on the paper he had been marking and erasing, and then,

"Yes, sir."

He put the receiver back and stood with his thumb between his teeth. Then he put out the light and stepped to the door. There was not a sound save the sputter of a launch at the dock. The same faint glow from candles low down in rowboats like souls afloat on the dark tide of eternity. Then he was aware of a huge black shadow moving athwart his vision, the turrets and castellated structure of an obsolete battleship, the *Jupiter*, a relic of the eighties. Or was it the nineties? Stephan had heard she was to dry-dock at Alexandria.

The message he had received over the telephone was this: All neutral shipping detained until further orders. The *Goeben* was out in the Ægean somewhere; a super-dreadnought, with a speed of nearly thirty knots, and an armament of thirteen-point-fives which could convert Port Said into a brick-yard, a shambles; and block the Canal, in half an hour.

II

THE thing to do, he decided under the shower next morning, was to hold those ships up without letting them know they were being held up for that particular reason. At the same time he was thinking that Ethel was taking an unnecessarily decided tone toward him. After all, why did she come out and marry him if they were never to have any children? Putting the matter to himself in this blunt fashion gave him a kind of Dutch courage. He saw Ethel sitting up in bed smoking a cigarette and telling him in a low tone that it was out of the question until the war was over. And God of Battles, that might be another two years! Well, what was he going to do about it?

The typist, a Syrian from Homs, was lifting the cover off his machine when Stephan came out. Mrs. Rumford was unwell this morning, he was told. He was to hold the fort for an hour.

Quite impossible, eh? The fact was, he was a better reader of character than he gave himself credit for. Ethel, he had a feeling, had changed since she had been in Port Said. An impalpable barrier lay between them. The way she had turned her gaze on him last night . . . An expression of surprise at his temerity.

Now she was sick. Or was she? Well, he had to find a funk hole for her. If the *Goeben* got within range of Port Said the wooden shingle roof of the Custom House was not calculated to keep shells out of their apartment. He must find a place. As he stepped into the Rue el Tegara he discovered that his emotions were most com-

plicated. He was in a coil over Ethel's attitude last night, he was suspicious of her illness this morning, and he had a horror of her being in any danger of death. He didn't want to be mashed into a sort of pulp and spread all over the Custom House Quay himself, come to that. Now he entered the store of Simon Artz, short for Artzibagian of Georgia, on the Pontic shore. The head salesman moved rapidly to his side. Stephan told him he needed a quieter place to live, an apartment in the town. Did he know of such a place?

The head salesman did. He was an Armenian and every Armenian has real estate in the blood. He had an uncle who could let the captain have just what he wanted.

"For a month," said Stephan, watching him. "Where's this uncle?"

Telephoning found him. The salesman returned with a look of ecstasy on his face. He would get a commission from his uncle. His uncle would get a commission from the actual landlord.

In a month, Stephan thought, as he drove down the Rue du Nil and across the Place Abbas, the *Goeben* would be done for anyhow. There was evidently no word of her in the town. The *Jupiter* had not gone to Alexandria after all. In a month he would know many things he could not fathom now. He kept his mind on external worries. The carriage stopped in front of a four-storied stucco house in the Place Abbas. The uncle, with a beard, was waiting for him.

It was on the second floor, rather stuffy and overfurnished, but comfortable. He would take it for a month. The landlord's agent, a Jew without a beard, promised to have it ready at once. They were very deferential. They gave Stephan the impression that they

wanted him to set his heel on their necks as he passed out. He stopped before a door on the landing and read the card:

Madame Ernestine
Modes

"I don't like that," he told the uncle harshly, who hoisted his shoulders. That was the last thing he would have anticipated. "But I suppose it can't be helped in war-time."

He left them in doubt of his sanity and quarrelling softly over commissions. In the Place Abbas he saw Swaffham, R. N. A. S., being driven rapidly toward the Maison de Lesseps, which was the house he had just quitted. Stephan raised himself and saw the white-uniformed Swaffham, with a huge puggaree instead of a uniform cap, hurry into the building. He threw himself back on the seat of the carriage. For a minute he debated whether to abandon the scheme. But his wife wasn't safe on the front there.

"What's he up to? What the hell's he up to?" he asked the hot morning sunlight. Swaffham was supposed to be furiously in love with Violetta Merola, the chemist's daughter on the Rue du Nil. And now here he was, at *nine in the morning*, visiting some Levantine piece of fluff. . . . Damn! The shopgirl was bad enough. Oh, why didn't the bloody air-people send him off on a strafe instead of letting him rot round Port Said going all soft in the brains and being made a fool of?

He went up to tell his wife what he had done. She stared. He explained in a low tone the news from Navy House.

"Why didn't you tell me last night?"

That was a very hard question to answer. Perhaps her eternal "Consult the R. N. O., dear" had something to do with it. He frowned.

"The R. N. O. himself told you?" she asked. He nodded. "Well——" she recalled their conversation last night and closed her eyes. Stephan was aware that she was annoyed.

"If you like I'll get the R. N. O. to send you down to Ismailia," he said.

She opened her eyes wide.

"Not yet, I think," she said. "What would he take me for? A funk! And why live in the town? It must be terribly hot over there."

"The *Goeben* means planes from Palestine," he said quietly. "At night probably."

"It would be time enough when we hear she is actually coming?"

"And find all the rooms taken. No, we'll move in at once. I shall feel easier in my mind."

He was not convinced about her illness.

"Shall I get the M. O. to look in, dear?"

A sudden weariness came over Ethel's face as she shook her head slightly. It was as though for an instant she had realized the futility of a life-long pose. And then once more she was alert, masterful, efficient, intelligent and English.

"No. I'll get up. Are you going out again?"

"In the launch. Quite sure you feel all right now?"

"Oh, quite. Tell Mr. Yakoub I shall be out in a quarter of an hour."

Mr. Yakoub was in conversation with a stout person in a pongee suit fanning himself with a black straw hat. It appeared, from Mr. Yakoub's report, that it was the

captain of a Greek steamer just in from Karachi, chartered by the Ministry of Shipping to take general cargo to Genoa. But Captain Zakalis had brought "a little wood" on deck. Could he have a permit to land it?

Stephan took his seat at his desk. This was his daily work. A little wood, eh? How much?

"Just a leetle, on deck, Captain."

"How many foot run?" Stephan ran his eye over the log of the *Philarion*, three thousand tons register. Ten knots, eh? He raised his eyes.

"I asked you a question. You want to land some lumber, I understand. How many thousand foot run have you on deck? Who gave you permission to carry it on deck? Who owns this lumber?"

It transpired that Captain Zakalis owned the lumber, that he wished permission to land it and sell it, at a profit of about one thousand per cent. plus free freight from Karachi. To Stephan it was staggering that this dago didn't even comprehend his own cheek in asking for such a thing. Captain Zakalis mopped his forehead and looked earnestly at the lieutenant.

"It would be a good thing for you and me——" he began. Stephan cut him off.

"You mean you would offer me a share to let your stuff through? I dare say." He was figuring on a scratch block. "You said a hundred thousand feet. H-m. You paid five hundred pounds for it in Karachi. It is two piastres tariff a foot here. You paid no freight at all. It's a government-chartered ship. If you carry your own lumber on deck the government has a right to charge you freight. The freight from Karachi is sixteen pounds a ton. Just a minute, Captain." Stephan opened a pocket-book of marine tables. "Forty, forty-two point seven—

well, we'll call it forty tons. That's six hundred and seventy-two pounds freight you owe us."

The captain of the *Philarion* was moving backward out of the office. He looked preoccupied. To be juggled out of his profits at the last moment like that! He knew he would have to pay high for labour to unload his lumber. His lip trembled. He felt as though in the presence of a person not quite right in his head. To shout it all out like that! When a little conversation over a vermouth in the Marina would have arranged it. He was shaken.

"But I tell you what I'll do, Captain," he heard the lieutenant's voice proceeding. "I'll give you a permit to land your lumber if you will bring me an approval from the transport officer that he can use the stuff, and will pay a reasonable price on your purchase. Say twenty per cent.?"

It sounded like the raving of a maniac to Captain Zakalis. He had never made as little as twenty per cent. since the war started. He was half convinced the lieutenant had not understood the situation. This was *business*. He gazed at Stephan. The lieutenant's white uniform was fresh but frayed at the collar, his white buckskin shoes were well worn, his epaulettes stained with green on the lace. He needed money, the captain reflected dully; what was the matter with his brain?

As Captain Zakalis descended he met the chief of police and the encounter did not soothe his nerves. But Bek'ahri Bey was not thinking of Greek skippers particularly. He stepped firmly upon the sunlit balcony and fixed an austere contemplative eye upon the row of Arabs in blue nightgowns topped by red fezzes who stood waiting with permits in their sun-scorched hands.

He was a tall handsome man; swart, with black moustaches; his tarboosh a glowing cherry red with a violet tassel. He had been at Omdurman when Kitchener broke the Mahdi's power.

He stepped into the reception room and made a profound bow to Ethel, who was giving orders to an Arab servant. He allowed his gaze to flow over her as though making a mould of her shape to hold in memory. His culture was French. He had the French conception of women, and a slightly satirical skepticism of their ultimate virtue. But Ethel did not attract him. She had the hard surface finish, the protective varnish, which is the secret of Englishwomen abroad. And his own fancy was for clean sharp hocks. But he bowed again. Stephan came in with the parcel of hashish.

Bek'ahri Bey set down his tarboosh and examined the dark and sinister composition whose importation carried with it a sentence of five years in the prison at Rond Point in Alexandria. His men were eternally raiding allotments and rooting up the bushes from which it was made. Periodical descents upon the boatmen followed. Yet it came in. It was sold in the chemists' shops. Officers asked for cigarettes impregnated with it and protected the shops that sold it. That fellow Merola was under scrutiny even now. A man doesn't get rich selling quinine and fruit salts, does he?

And then he heard Stephen saying in a low emphatic voice that the sentry was quite possibly in the swindle.

"We have a boatman in prison now," said Bek'ahri Bey in a deep tone. "We caught him two days ago, going to the *Syrinx*, the monitor, you know." Stephan nodded and immediately looked with wide-open eyes up and down the policeman's tall form. "Well, what are we to

do? He has a fine story, I can assure you. Suppose we arrest your sentry, or the provost marshal arrests him, and we begin to dig, dig? Eh? If you dig you find an officer! Now you tell us, Mr. Rumford, what are we to do? If I get that boatman five years, do you suppose he will keep his mouth shut? Or do you want an officer of the navy to get five years too?"

He wrapped up the drug and handed it back to the lieutenant. Ethel said clearly,

"Stephan, I'm sure the R. N. O. ought to know about this." Bek'ahri Bey took up his tarboosh.

"I would prefer *you* to tell the R. N. O. about my boatman and his story of the *Syrinx*," he said and, making a fresh obeisance, stalked out into the sunlight.

"I am going to Navy House, then to the *Alceste* for a few minutes, then to this Greek ship, the *Philarion*. Nothing except small general stores to be approved till I return." He was speaking to Ethel and also to Mr. Yakoub, who was close at hand. Ethel did not reply. She was thinking. She saw the launch sputter off past a coaling British India liner whose rail was crowded with Indian troops looking down at the swarms of boats and drawing up baskets of fruit. She was thinking, and the effort made her look spiteful. Mr. Yakoub regarded her timidly. He had to take a lot of bullying from both of them, especially from Ethel. Mr. Yakoub worked behind a screen near the door of the reception room. When the R. N. O. came for tea, Mr. Yakoub could see them through the hinge of the screen. And what he saw was confusing to his Levantine intelligence, which had been trained in a Jesuit college in Syria. When he turned to the filing cabinet his eye was close to the slit in the screen. When he faced his typewriter, he could see

Stephan bent over his desk or leaning back talking to the people who came in for permits. Then Mr. Yakoub would incline his brachycephalic head on his olive-tinted hand and study the keys of his machine. When Ethel looked at him in that impersonal way of hers—the Englishwoman abroad—as though he were a vacuum cleaner or a thermos flask, he would feel a sudden desire to attack her. He did not desire her, because she had flat breasts and slender haunches; but he experienced gusts of elemental savagery which stimulated his imagination. He pictured himself, while contemplating the keys of his Remington, seizing her by the throat and slowly forcing her head backward into the jade-green basin of a fountain in the court of a house he had once visited at Homs. He saw himself watching her there, the bubbles rushing from her wide-open mouth, her eyes bulging, her limbs jerking and twining about his taut body.

He would wake with a start as Stephen asked sharply, "What's the Arabic for 'lettuce,' Yakoub?"

Now he watched her with a faint tinge of amusement on his dark face. His intelligence was entirely adequate to the simple task of divining her emotions. He had never been to the westward and he had been born at Homs in northern Syria. When he thought of his own wife, who had left him for an Italian ship captain in Alexandria, when he was a clerk, Ethel appeared to be a stringy savourless morsel. He wondered what his wife was doing. She was a woman with a creamy skin, gray eyes, and an aureole of copper hair. She was from the Trentino by way of the *merceria* in Venice. She had become infatuated with a stocky bully of a shipmaster from Sampierdarena. She had put her tongue out at her husband and then spat in his face when he tried to force

his way into his own house, while the Italian captain had lolled on the sofa, smoking a cigar and laughing.

George Yakoub blinked and his mind returned to the present. By and by he would get a divorce and marry an Englishwoman. He took a paper from Ethel's outstretched hand.

"See if it's all right, Mr. Yakoub, please," she spoke in her clear metallic voice. "They are going through the Canal in an hour."

Purposely he left his sun glasses, as he rose, under a sheet of paper. He thought: "She is going to telephone the R. N. O." At the foot of the stairway he returned and saw her at the receiver, crouched lovingly, he thought, and caressing it with her lips.

"Excuse me," he murmured and took his glasses, walking out with downcast eyes. He saw her look of annoyance nevertheless.

Ethel listened to the squawks and scratches leaping out of the steady stream of buzzing, like fish leaping from a river, which seemed to flow through the wire. She knew she had no business to go to the R. N. O. about this notion Stephan had of taking a flat in the town. She knew almost as surely that the R. N. O. would be careful to head her off. Yet she could not resist the temptation to talk to him. She was in a state of panic for fear that dago paymaster, if his boss was out, would recognize her voice. In that case she would snub him and ring off.

Ethel's personality was a compactly rolled organism enclosing a conventional soul. She was exasperated by her husband's attitude toward the opportunities of his position. He went ecstatically out of his way to antagonize the neutral element. They needed wood bitterly in

Salonika and here was a hundred thousand feet of pine ready to hand. Stephan lacked tact, she thought. She glanced at the waiting Arabs on the balcony. Her idea was to establish connections with all these people and then, when the war was over, he could go into business in London. Of course that was his idea too, but in practice he was antagonizing them. Business is business. Stephan was disagreeably incorruptible. She said to herself, "He lacks tact." And then,

"Oh! Are you there, Captain Gamble? Yes, Mrs. Rumford speaking. I'm so sorry. We shan't be in for tea this afternoon. Mrs. Callisthenes and I are going to have tea on the *Cardiganshire*."

There was a low murmur that it was a little slice of luck for the *Cardiganshire*.

"And I wanted to tell you we've rented a funk hole, in the town. Lot of rot, I think, but Stephan fancies we might have an air raid, and so . . . What? I didn't hear that."

The murmur repeated something about "better be sure than sorry." Anyhow, it went on, he, the speaker, was in favour of any scheme to protect a certain person not to be mentioned.

"You are going to be quite impossible, I'm afraid," said Ethel. Her eyes were so brilliant the waiting Arabs stood watching her in amazement.

The murmur added, "Oh, quite." A thrill ran through her as she listened. He rang off.

Stephan was in Navy House by this time. He walked in and sought the R. N. O. at once. The latter was just concluding a telephone conversation.

"What's the matter with your face?" said the R. N. O. He often reflected to himself that it was inconceivable

how a brilliant woman like Ethel had married this plugging insensible sort of chap. One of the reliable sort, Rumford. What had he been doing to his face?

Stephan told him.

"I'd have had him, so he shied it at me and got away. It felt as heavy as a brick, sir. And that sentry was conniving, I'll swear." Stephan touched his face tenderly.

"Well, the police will pretend to do something as usual. By the way, what do you wish to report? There's a signal just come in for you."

"There are several neutrals we can let go, sir. As far as Alexandria. It might be a good plan to propose the convoy again."

"It might be, but they won't do it," said the R. N. O., rubbing the bridge of his nose.

"We'll come to it sooner, later or too late."

"I dare say we shall. I've an idea you're right, Rumford. But just now you have to go to Suez." He picked up a naval signal form and handed it to Stephan.

To R. N. O. *Port Said*

From H. M. S. Reynard

Lieut. S. Rumford R. N. R. to report to Reynard for service on court martial tomorrow Thursday

Coombes Rear-Admiral

Stephan clamped the lid on his thoughts for a moment and looked at the R. N. O., who said:

"There's a two-striper just out of hospital who can visit the ships for you. His ship is a sweeper—the *Cockchafer* I think—and she won't be in till to-morrow night. You'd better get the four o'clock train to Zagazig unless you can catch a ship going through. You can return to-morrow night, I should say."

"Yes, sir. Is the admiral president of the court?"

"I shouldn't think so. Captain Throcker of the *Reynard* is, more likely. But it's a local officer who's being tried. A Maltee I think. He got stewed at an Arab wedding, very important people, and bashed another guest over the head with a champagne bottle. So they asked me to suggest a third member of the court."

"I have no experience," he warned.

"All the better, probably. The evidence will come through interpreters anyhow."

"I must visit a Greek ship at once, Captain."

"Don't let me keep you."

Stephen hurried to his launch. Out in the full glare of the sun he was strong. When the sun fell rapidly into the sea and the night rushed upon them out of Syria the devils, by which he knew himself to be surrounded, crept near, searching with stealthy fingers for the doors of his soul. But in the sun he was aware of streams of power coming to him from the masculine heart of the world. The launch sped toward the *Philarion*, a straight black tramp, whose slender funnel stood up above a deck load of yellow timber. Stephan eyed it grimly. A fortune! he thought. The launch began to circle the *Philarion*, Stephan noting the draft on the scale of stem and rudder. He saw Captain Zakalis looking down at him in some uneasiness. But he was at the gangway to welcome the lieutenant.

Stephan looked round the saloon as he entered. He sniffed slightly. Instead of taking the offered seat on the settee against the forward bulkhead he sat down on a stool and began to examine the ship's papers. Captain Zakalis signalled to the steward and a tray with glasses and a bottle of champagne was set on the table. Stephan

glanced up, and then called the captain's attention to the ship's draft on leaving Karachi.

"You drew twenty feet one aft and nineteen feet three forward when you sailed. You burn seventeen tons of coal a day. You've been fifteen days. Two hundred and fifty-five tons of coal besides the engine-room tank of fresh water, fifty tons. Say three hundred tons. Where is it? You draw twenty aft and nineteen forward now. What do you take us for?"

"Captain. The tanks. We run up the tanks for ballast," pleaded the captain. Master Zakalis was becoming rattled. He had no idea war would be like this.

"Did you? I'll sound them. Tell the carpenter to bring the sounding rod and I'll do it myself."

Stephan suddenly turned on the heavy-breathing captain.

"I'll tell you why I don't believe you. Look here." He led the way over the lumber to the starboard quarter and pointed downward.

"You've had that manhole open since you sailed. Yes, you have! Here, Chips"—Stephan scanned the carpenter's face, but came to no conclusion—"sound number three tank."

The plug was inside the engineer's quarters, in the mess-room floor. Stephan sniffed again. Odours of engine room, stale food, garlic, soiled clothing, and vermin came to a head in there. He watched the carpenter lowering the rod. He saw, through a doorway, a man lying on his bed in his working clothes. The carpenter began to haul up. It showed three feet of wetness on the chalked edge of the rod. Stephan stooped down suddenly and smelt at the sound pipe. Was there? Yes. By God there was a faint, faint trace of . . . He sprang up. The captain

was just outside in the narrow gangway left to reach the engine-room scuttle.

"Ye see, it is full," said Captain Zakalis.

"Pump it out at once. I will then see what draft you make."

Stephen went to the rail and looked across at the *Alceste*. She had a list. The sun, blazing down on her, made her look what she was, an obsolete coasting vessel, ready for the knacker's yard, as Stephan said to himself. She was insured for fifty thousand pounds, though. He glanced down at the discharge in the side of the *Philarion*. Clean water was gushing from it. He could hear the *clonk-clonk* of the old wheel donkey downstairs. But it didn't look like tank water. The first minute or two when you pumped out a tank there was a flow of yellowish sludge. He went down and ordered the carpenter to sound again. The tank was still full.

Stephan stepped into the engine room and began to descend the dirty ladder. His clothes were smeared with grease but his blood was now up. The real lure of his business was now gripping him. It gave him a feeling of superb pleasure to know that this Greek skipper was in a hell of a funk.

Down in the engine room the sound of the ballast donkey became an uproar. The thing itself was in a dark corner lit by a slush lamp hanging on the hand rail. One glance satisfied Stephan that his suspicions were correct. They were pumping sea water from the sea overboard again. The tank valves were shut. He climbed the ladder and strode along to the cabin.

Captain Zakalis pretended not to see the lieutenant. Captain Zakalis had been reduced to a species of mental paralysis because he had found himself unable to get

Stephan alone and offer him one hundred pounds, two hundred pounds, any number of pounds he liked to suggest, to go away and let the *Philarion* alone. He turned his back on this short truculent insane creature. He was very near crying with mortification when Stephan seated himself once more at the cabin table, dashing his cap down on the papers with sudden rage. Stephan was suddenly furious at the memory of his wife sitting in bed smoking a cigarette and calmly telling him it was "quite impossible" at present. Captain Zakalis jumped and turned with the look of a cowardly cornered dog. He moved across the cabin and closed the door.

"Mister," he said in a tense frightened whisper, "what you want? For Christ's sake tell me what you want? How was I to know you worry about a leetle wood?"

"Is the number three tank full of wood?" snarled Stephan, writing across the ship's log. "You want to know what I want?" He swung round on the Greek crouching near at hand, "I want to make you damned neutral swine understand you can't make money out of men's bodies. I want to make you understand I don't care a curse what the fellow in the next port does. You don't buy me! You will carry out your contract and I'm here to see you do it. You've got petrol in that ballast tank. I can smell it. You can't pump the water out of that tank because there isn't any in it except in a ten-gallon drum under the sounding pipe. The tank's full of cases of petrol and I believe methylated spirits. And you are bound to Genoa to discharge your jute, and this stuff will be in Germany via Switzerland inside of a week after you dock. You want to land your lumber here because you know the Italians would simply take it away from you. Get up! Don't kneel to me, you swine. If

you've got a God kneel to Him and see if He will forgive you. I doubt it! Do you think I've been here in Port Said eighteen months for nothing? Do you think you can bribe an officer with a bottle of fizz and a hundred quid? I suppose you do. You've done it often enough! But you don't do it north of Suez, mind you. And now I'll tell you why I don't kick you and rub your face in the dirt. It's because you belong to my own cloth, my old man's cloth and my friends' cloth. It's men like you make me ashamed of being a seaman. . . ."

He sat staring with unseeing eyes at the papers on the table, breathing deeply. He had never broken out like this before. How close he had been to accepting the Greek's offer nobody would ever know. But the devil was vanquished again. Each time he was stronger for the tussle. He was glad he could not see Anastasia this afternoon. Now he must go to the *Alceste*. He had a scheme. Cassar, Mifsud & Company could give him a passage to Suez. He would go over the vessel as she went through the Canal. She must not be delayed a moment after the *Goeben* had been located and the road to Salonika was clear. It would do him good to be away for a night, after what had passed. . . . Keep him from getting slack to serve on a naval court. Slackness everywhere. . . . Swaffham going to a girl at nine in the morning . . . that sentry conniving with Arabs to land hashish. And now this half-breed grifter with his tanks full of inflammable spirit. One spark would blow the bottom out of her!

He looked at the broad sheets of the manifest. If he held this ship there would be a shindy. She carried jute for the Italian mills and cotton for Marseilles. She had one hold forward full of nanganese ore for England. All

urgent. Suppose they discharged number three hold and then found a few miserable cans of petrol, poor grade too. What of it? he demanded of himself. This was a war of resources. To let vital stuff like oils go into Germany and Austria was the same thing as killing so many of our own men.

He gathered up the whole mess of documents and rose, cap in hand. He was too upset to speak to the captain. The man's attitude of cringing remorse evoked in his heart a horrible hatred of the universal peculation going on all over the world. He became aware of Captain Zakalis's point of view. Zakalis felt he was unfairly cornered. "Everybody's doing it." The man was using those words!

"Mister, you goin' to make trouble for me? Two can do it, mister."

"Don't you worry about making trouble, Captain. I'll do that. You'll need all your brains to keep out of jail."

"Don't you do that, mister!"

"You don't know I won't. You and your cheap champagne!" He turned the bottle to look at the label. "So that's the sort of people you've been dealing with? Keep it for Genoa. But you'll lie here till I consult the R. N. O."

He walked to the accommodation ladder and descended to the launch.

The *Alceste* was near by, coaling. Stephen reached the deck as Messrs. Cassar and Mifsud came out of the chart room.

The two owners of the *Alceste* wore expressions of deep concern. They had been in the ship-chandlering business until the war; this was their first ship. They were fussy, and the captain looked sourly at this fresh invasion.

"Lieutenant, this is the captain. He is going to make a survey."

Stephan asked them when the ship left for Port Tewfik. About three, they thought.

"Then I will go with her. I have business in Suez tomorrow morning. I can go over her on the way through."

"That will be splendid," said Mr. Cassar.

"I can't stay now. I'll be back about three." Stephan rolled the *Philarion's* papers tighter and stepped down the gangway. He thought, "Now for Ranciulli."

He had this idea in his head for visiting the eminent ship chandler. He would have heard all about the Arab wedding hullabaloo in Suez and might have something interesting to let drop. His daughters would discuss it at home. And there was Ibrahim Farag to be dealt with. Farag was really a matter for the police. If Farag had implicated Ranciulli the old fellow would be in a mood to reveal anything he knew about the hilarious Maltee junior officer in Suez.

Stephan, as he landed, saw Mrs. Callisthenes in the shade of the Marina veranda. She waved to him and then, as he answered, beckoned. He felt strong in the sunlight, able to withstand everything except the numbness about his heart, which he traced to the conversation with Ethel as she sat there smoking. "Quite impossible, just now." Like that. Some men would take that as a release; something like letters of *marque*. Permission from the queen to go privateering, so to speak. He paused, near where he had received the parcel of drug on his face. Images sped through his mind like the sliding letters on a moving night-sign. Ethel in the office—naval court—Swaffham making an ass of himself—Cassar and Mifsud.

He waved his hand and turned into the Rue el Tegara. An old chantey came to mind. He hummed it.

I placed my hand upon her knee,
Says she, "Young man you make too free-ee!"
Oh—I'll go—no more—a-ro-vin'
Since rovin's been my roo-in,
I'll go no more a-rovin',
With you—fair—maids!

Not that he, Stephan, had ever done that sort of thing, except one or two experiments when he was an apprentice in sail. He had lived a clean honourable life. He had never deceived Ethel. And now . . . He felt the numbness again.

These were the times that tried men's souls.

He couldn't wish that one on MacTaggart. Must have read it somewhere himself. He entered the office. Ethel was comparing a word on a requisition with the same word in the Arabic dictionary. Mr. Yakoub was making a clatter on his Remington.

"Can you manage?" he asked and she looked at him for an explanation. He told her of the business at Suez.

"The *Philarion*," he said, laying down the papers. "Ask the R. N. O. to look at the memorandum I will leave with them. He can initial it—or not. And the skipper of the *Cockchafer*, just out of hospital, will assist you to-morrow. I'll be back to-morrow night or next morning. I must go and see a man in the town at once."

"Then you won't be able to tea on the *Cardiganshire*," said Ethel. He shook his head.

"You'll have to drop me at the *Alceste* on your way," he said.

Mr. Yakoub permitted himself a split second's glance

at Ethel's face. One thing perplexed this cultivated native of Homs who had recently changed his allegiance from the Ottoman to the British Empire. Why did the lieutenant make his wife work in an office? He decided: Poverty. That would explain her being the friend of the R. N. O. The talk in Port Said was that the latter had never looked at a woman since he came. Yakoub reflected that the town had never seen what went on at tea time. Those two talked with their eyes. He was intelligent, educated, poor, speaking five languages. He intended to go into business after the war. He desired earnestly to understand the English because he would have to do business with them. It was not easy. They seemed to him to have secret devils tearing at their entrails, their faces were so tortured.

Stephan took a carriage to Ranciulli's store. It was between the Place de Lesseps and the Greek church, a convenient corner site. In the grateful gloom of the outer office he was at first able to see nothing. Then Captain Bannister's rich winey voice,

"Ah there! Thought you'd be in."

Stephan saw Mr. Ranciulli rising from behind his desk like a blimp out of a hangar. He was a large man, with a gigantic belly straining the seersucker suit. He looked over his glasses, his head crouching slightly at Stephan. Captain Bannister sat with one leg over the other, reading the *Egyptian Gazette*, and at him Stephan lowered a glance of perplexity.

He thought, "I am done now, as far as that Farag is concerned. Bannister is a Catholic, I forgot. He and Ranciulli have been fixing it all up. I thought he was stewed. Well, he was; but this morning he probably got up at six to say his prayers like Jimmie MacGowan on

the *Lucania,* and it reminded him Ranciulli was in a mess, so he came ashore. I was a fool to tell him it was a requisition from Ranciulli. I wonder where Farag is. I'll shoot that grinning Arabian before the war is over! Very likely I won't get a chance now. Ranciulli's going to spring something. A Maltee always has one dodge you never thought of before."

Mr. Ranciulli looked as though he were going to make an after-dinner speech. He stood at his desk, removed his glasses, which he used for reading and writing only, and twirled them. He began to boom out words.

"Lieutenant Rumford. I am extremely sorry to hear what my friend Captain Bannister has been telling me."

Stephan said to himself at this point: "Oh Gawd-dammit, why didn't somebody kick me in the seat and tell me I ought to be in the forecastle of a windbag instead of pretending to be a naval officer? Why in the name of a merciful God did I confide my professional secrets to a man like Captain Bannister? Answer—because I thought he was aware there is a war on. He isn't. He has, so far as his *brain* is concerned, never known that his country's at war. He is like all the rest of them except a dozen or so here, thinking about his own comfort, and the comfort of his fellow papists. I ought to have known. It only shows you how hard it is to have ordinary common sense in war time."

While he was cursing himself he sat and listened to Mr. Ranciulli's newest dodge. It wasn't his last, however. Mr. Ranciulli had been acquainted with all the guile from Suez north to Constanza and west to Gibraltar before Stephan was born. One of his sons was at this moment in Alexandria in "a confidential capacity," which meant he was entrusted with the job of getting

officers on leave into trouble with the women who lived on the Boulevard Ramleh. Very discreet young fellow in a military tailor's shop. He reported to a woman who had a house in the Rue de l'Ancienne Bourse, whose letters were taken by the mate of a Roumanian Lloyd steamer, now a transport, to Patras. A week later an *Oberleutnant* in the Wilhelmstrasse glanced through them and made an entry in a card index.

Stephan did not know all this but he was prepared to believe it. Had he known it he would have been able to convince himself that Ranciulli *père* was not in his son's confidence. That didn't matter a damn. The point was, these people were so crooked it was impossible to—do what Bannister had been doing, for instance—treat them as family friends.

". . . but the young fellow Farag has been dismissed and has had no connection with my business for several days. A-hoom!"

"You see?" said Captain Bannister. "What I told you. I knew there was a mistake somewhere. Out of the question, Mr. Ranciulli having anything to do with it."

Stephan had a feeling of being smothered under slowly collapsing feather beds. His own fault, he told himself, taking Bannister into his confidence. He was being smothered. He would have to make an effort to get away. No use trying to get anything out of Ranciulli about the Suez affair now. Bannister would barge into that too. And for Farag, he would have to set other wheels going.

"Yes," he said suddenly. "I do see. I've got to get on, then. Mr. Ranciulli, you understand that in future all your requisitions will have to be personally presented."

Mr. Ranciulli had been busy with a decanter which an

Arab servant had brought, a costly cut-glass affair on a bronze tray with a Sudanese brass-inlaid-with-silver cigar box. He looked at Stephan with a sudden twitch of the pouches under his eyes.

"Personally? You mean I have to leave my office to——"

"Personally." Stephan reached over and got his cap. Captain Bannister, suddenly aware of government at work, made no comment. He disapproved; thought young Rumford was making an ass of himself; but he said nothing.

"You don't suggest——" began Mr. Ranciulli, standing up. Stephan rose also and put on his cap.

"I say you will present your requisitions in person or I shall not pass them," he remarked. "If you like to make a complaint to the R. N. O. you can. I have no objection."

He went out into the glare of the street. Life wasn't easy at times, he reflected. He wondered what had made him so savagely courageous all of a sudden. The trouble was, these bursts of determination had their reactions. He was uncertain afterward whether he was justified in his attitude. As a rule he was, he found.

He was thinking of Bannister now. Bannister was one of his own kind. And Bannister would shake his head in private. His opinion of Stephan would drop; there would be a cloud over the tea party that afternoon. Well, Stephan was not going. He was glad he was not going. It was a bad plan to be chummy with anybody these days. Yet, dammitall, a man needed some recreation. He had his emotions, his appetites, his craving for the society of men and women. Yes, but he had to do without them. Our men were dying by thousands on every front,

Flanders, France, the Carso and Gorizia, in Macedonia and Mesopotamia and Palestine. We had to deny ourselves here in a base just as much as they in the trenches. But did we?

He saw, in a café on the corner of the Place de Lesseps, an officer and a girl. Pretty Dick. The girl was new. Now and then the Constantinople Divan For Officers Only got a new girl from Marseilles. Pretty Dick was the type of two-pip Cuthbert to be the first in line. He had his arm round her neck. She wore his cap. Stephan saw them look up at him and then Pretty Dick looked away for an instant. What was the use? Stephan asked himself. If his own adjutant couldn't give Pretty Dick something to do (if it was only addressing envelopes or sweeping the office), why should anybody else give a damn?

But there was an example. Pretty Dick with his expression of dark idiocy, his patent-leather hair, his *L'origan* perfume and his gold identification plate, with a platinum chain, on his wrist, was a sample of what Stephan was thinking. The fool had the idea he was a soldier of the King, serving his country, ready to die for Old England. And here he was playing with a beastly little Catalan prostitute from the Rue d'Aventure in Marseilles. Pretty Dick knew no more now than when he left Eton, or Winchester, or whatever swagger school it was he came from. He knew neither Arabic nor French. He was exhibited here to all these Levantine people as a sample of England, and what they thought of him and us, in private, was plenty. Could anybody blame them? Was Ranciulli to be censured for thinking himself a superior article to Pretty Dick? He was, by God, he was! And so for that matter was Ibrahim Farag, who

was in Turkish pay. Yes, he was. What a joke when they discovered that the old Syrian doctor living in the Eastern Exchange Hotel was an Austrian agent! He had been caught and sent home, and the ship had been sunk. Yes, there was somebody behind Farag. And they were all *working!* That was what stuck in Stephan's craw. These damned English seemed to be out for a hell of a good time on pay, and nothing else. Ethel, now, was as set on going to tea on the *Cardiganshire* and rotting about among the Armenian carpet weavers, as though she were at home in peace time. They would sit there, she and . . . and Mrs. Callisthenes, and smoke Turkish cigarettes, and so far as they were concerned the *Goeben* could come out and do what she liked.

It was the *Goeben* which personified, in Stephan's imagination, the spirit of war. You didn't know where she was or what she would do, or when; but she remained, like destiny, in the background, secret and overwhelming.

Lunch now. He must buy some handkerchiefs at the Manchester House. It was peaceful in that small corner shop. Stephan passed a few quiet humdrum words with the Englishwoman at the desk. They came from Lancashire, those people. She did, anyhow. They presented their requisitions personally, he reflected. It would be a good plan, his mind added, to bond all these people. But it could never be done, he concluded. Too much of a squawk from the Home Rule crowd. He got his handkerchiefs and went on to the office. In the Rue el Tegara he saw an R. N. R. man crossing to speak to him. Ah! Perhaps . . .

"I'm Rigby, of the *Cockchafer*," said this chap. He was short, like Stephan, toughly seasoned, very strongly built and his face was weathered but pallid from hospital.

The gold lace and buttons of his clothes were green with sea-weathering. They shook hands.

"Come and have lunch. I'll introduce you to Mrs. Rumford."

"She's in the office, isn't she?"

"Your assistant till I return. I shan't be more than two nights in Suez."

Here was a contemporary with a faint tinge of awe in his attitude toward Stephan because of the *Lucania* and the extra-master's certificate. This fellow, Harry Rigby, had gone up four times before he passed for master. As for extra—thank you, no. He *hadn't* an examination brain. But probably would be a better shipmaster than Stephan. Yet they were contemporaries. And the work of the Examination Office would be simple to Rigby.

"Only thing is, see for yourself," said Stephan. That was the kind of advice Rigby had been getting ever since he had left the *Conway*. See for yourself! . . . *What's the draft of water forward?* Seventeen feet. *How do you know? Did you look?* Oh, I asked the carpenter, sir. *Damn the carpenter! Go and see for yourself. The curse of young officers is letting the bos'n do it.* . . . Rigby had grown up in an atmosphere of seeing for himself. And he deeply admired Mrs. Rumford. She was aware at once of the correctness of his attitude toward herself. She heard he was a *Conway* boy. That was like having been to Rugby or Charterhouse, in a way. It placed you. Stephan was a *Conway* boy. They had lunch brought in from the Marina and sent Yakoub out for his.

Mr. Yakoub lunched at a place on a corner of the Rue Sultan Osman, turning to the left twice out of the Rue el Tegara. It was cool, and many respectable Nazarenes ate at the small tables against the walls. Girls

who worked in the shops snatched hasty meals there. Mr. Yakoub was happy in this restaurant, yet it angered him to think he was never invited to join the Rumfords. He knew it was not because he was the clerk, but because he was a Syrian. What would they say when they knew he had put in his submission to be made sub-lieutenant, Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve? They'd have to let him in then! A Coptic clerk he knew in Cairo had just written him that they were granting these commissions to Levantines in naval offices.

The thought of this preoccupied him, as he wolfed his tunnyfish fried in oil, and he did not see a woman in the corner staring at him through the smoke of her cigarette. She was dressed in cream serge, with a turban of yellow silk fastened with a flat brooch of brilliants over black brows. The face was marred by her nose, with its sensual tip, and the lips painted so heavily they resembled smudges of black blood. Mr. Yakoub at length saw her and the two pairs of black eyes glowed for an instant. Madame Ernestine permitted herself a faint, a very faint, smile. She knew Mr. Yakoub, and Mr. Yakoub knew her in the way every Levantine seems to knew every other Levantine, as every Central American is familiar with the family affairs of every other Central American. They were about to make one another's personal acquaintance. Mr. Yakoub smiled down at his food. She was from Homs; he knew that at any rate. She seemed to have a desire to speak to him. He went on eating.

Presently, when he had ordered coffee, he stepped through the door of the café and sat down outside to smoke a cigarette. This was a moment when he assumed the full stature and arrogance of a free man. His ancestors had been the viziers of satrapies and their women

had travelled in litters to enter the seraglio at Stamboul. Now he was a Nazarene, a clerk, a British subject and he had passed the London University matriculation. Sometimes he would sit at a little table drinking Turkish coffee and forget the Occident.

Madame Ernestine paused at his table and he sprang up to admit her to the corner chair.

He was perfectly well aware that she had not expressed a desire to make his acquaintance because of his beautiful eyes. He knew she and other women like her were generally occupied professionally with Franks. And while they conversed rapidly in Arabic concerning the heat, the rationing of food, the high rents, and the arrival of letters cut to pieces by censors, he waited for her to give him a clue. Soon it came.

"Oh, well, I must return to my house. I am in trouble, my friend."

"I will get a carriage," he said courteously and returned from the corner with one at once.

On the way to the Place Abbas she told him in a swift undertone that an officer was in her apartment in a stupor from hashish. He had collapsed after a too-heavy indulgence. What was she to do? He would be missed? In his pocket he had a note on a piece of paper of the distance to Homs, in kilometers. He was a flying officer. If a search were made and the police found him in her place she would go to prison.

"Maria! What is his name?" demanded Yakoub. He stared at this fellow countrywoman. She was from his own town of Homs.

They went into the building with the new stucco front and elaborate entrance hall, watched by the uncle of the Armenian salesman. This bearded person followed. They

were stepping into the lift, which was self-operated. Madame Ernestine closed the gates and pressed the second-floor button. The lift began to move with such portentous deliberation that the Armenian uncle had hobbled to the floor above before they lost sight of the waiting *fiacre* at the curb. Yakoub had a sensation of some primitive superstition coming true.

When they stepped out, the Armenian uncle was there, leaning on his stick. The door of the other apartment was open. A broom leaned against a chair in the entry. They looked at each other, and their eyes glowed again.

"An English naval officer and his wife have taken this house," intoned the elderly one. "They arrive this evening."

A thrill shot through George Yakoub. Ethel had alluded to a mysterious house where in future she would sleep. He had seen a suitcase half-packed when he went into the reception room that morning.

"From the Custom House?" he asked politely.

The ancient nodded and moved round on the pivot of his stick to peer at Mr. Yakoub.

"He is a great friend of mine," went on the latter. "Is the house ready? He asked me to inquire."

"All is in readiness," chanted the old man. "They come at sunset, he said."

"We will inspect it and so report to the officer," said Yakoub. "Meanwhile it is right to have flowers to welcome the very sweet wife of my friend. Go you and buy flowers. Here are ten piastres. You get fine roses in the Rue el Tegara."

They watched him totter away downward a few steps at a time, pausing to adjust his old robe. The lift, sinking automatically with inconceivable slowness to the ground

floor, struck Mr. Yakoub with an uncomfortable feeling in his entrails in spite of his success in the London University matriculation.

"Now!" said Madame Ernestine, and flew to her own door.

A moment later, Lieutenant Commander Percy Swaffham, R. N. A. S., was being carried swiftly to a cane *chaise-longue* in Ethel's new boudoir.

As he followed Ernestine back into her apartment George Yakoub looked carefully at the high double French doors on the landing. Nobody. He sighed. He was perfectly at home in this sort of game, but he had imagined it all behind him. He sat down in a chair and lit a cigarette.

"He comes often?" he said, when she returned from her bedroom. She nodded.

"Many times—for the smoke."

"Of course. You are from Iskanderiyeh?"

"Yes, I live there once. And you?"

"My wife is there now. I have put her out. She is the plaything of a Frank."

"My child is in Homs."

"Oh! Homs. I live there until I go to the college at Beirut. Then I come to Iskanderiyeh and marry my wife. I have job in Roumanian Lloyd office. Now I am in naval office."

"You like?" she asked politely. Her business was mostly with people getting rich from doing business with the army and navy.

"No! When I think of it, I spit!" he said angrily. "English officer and his wife." He pressed his thumb hard on the arm of the chair, relaxed into a scowling silence. She looked at him for a moment and then rose. She

thrust her arm into a tall vase and brought out a notebook.

"Since one week," she said. "And one day, last Sunday it is, the Frank's Sunday, I have a friend from Ismailia. He is Turkish subject from Homs, like me and you. He change to British too. When I am in that room he find this."

"He look for your money," giggled Mr. Yakoub.

"Perhaps not!" she returned contemptuously, knowing how Mr. Yakoub had suspected that. "He is rich and very angry because his Greek woman send him away. He come for pipe. He walk about while I get him some hashish. He sees the book. Now what shall I do?"

"Go to the police captain, Bek'ahri Bey. Tell all or it will be bad for us Syrian people. Your friend from Ismailia will be back?"

"No. He goes to his house in the Boulevard Champollion, where he have big café for officers only. He have big house in Heliopolis. Very rich man, Neirreddin Bey. He have pass from French admiral. But he lose his Greek girl."

Mr. Yakoub made no reply. His mind did not take in the full significance of a pass from the French admiral. It may be doubted whether he understood very much of the war beyond the range of Port Said. As for Greek girls, the country was full of them. He turned over the pages slowly until he came to the entries last written, and glanced up at his companion. Suddenly he thrust the thing away from him with a savage theatrical gesture and a febrile flutter of his hands.

"What is the good?" demanded the woman, who understood what he meant. "It would be traced to me. What can I do?"

"You must take it to Bek'ahri Bey," he said, warding off her glance with a long brown hand. "I wish respectable life. For me to have knowledge of that book would bring me trouble. I tell you now the best thing. I go with you to Bek'ahri Bey."

"The police?" she muttered doubtfully. He nodded.

"As I come to visit my friend from Homs," he said, "I find that in the passage of the building. I see it is official. I speak to you to go to police at once."

"To-night?"

"To-night, late, when Bek'ahri Bey receive reports in his office on the Rue d'Arsenal."

"Why late? He will put me in prison if I am out of my house late."

"No!" said Mr. Yakoub. "It will be best. There will be nobody there then. I will go to see him before. He will know you are coming."

"You are good friend to me," she smiled invitingly, "how——"

"No!" said Mr. Yakoub hastily. "For me respectable life. I have had wife in Iskanderiyeh."

And he hurried away as Ernestine, a blank stare on her face, suddenly raised her shoulder in the immemorial Latin gesture.

III

STEPHAN, on the *Alceste*, moving through the Canal, endeavoured to forget the complexities of life in Port Said. Here was a mess enough to make a naval architect marvel *how* she held together. Stephan put on the chief officer's overalls and, hammer in hand, descended into the cellular double bottoms of the ship. His hammer broke through the red-black crust of scale which constituted numerous frames down there. Rats had died and decomposed in her limbers. The heads of rivets which held the inner bottom to the knees snapped like carrots. One he kicked off with the heavy heel of the chief officer's shoes. Under the boilers the *Alceste* was alarming because her boilers were served with sea water, apparently, and the seams of them were bulbous with huge glittering inverted Byzantine domes of salt, dripping like stalactites upon the tank tops. These were laminated with corrosion and gave at the smash of the hammer. The bunkers were a relief, not because they were any better but because they were dry and a lifted hatch above permitted the sun to dart a ray upon the eerie mountains of coal in the corners. The interiors of the boilers he was thankful to leave, a French engineer having given them an extension expiring in three months. The forepeak had been filled with concrete some time before—an expedient pardonable but unprofessional. Even Stephan, hardened to the exigencies of the transports of Britain, who rules the waves, and allows her shipowners to make her shipping regulations, was dumbfounded at the *Alceste's* ammunition lockers. The

gun was mounted on a slab of armour plate on the high poop and the ammunition was under the steward's bed place abaft the saloon.

"Who works the gun! The cook?" he asked harshly, and told them to put the stuff in the lazaret under the poop.

And yet, for all the forlorn dilapidation of this French coasting steamer, he felt aboard of her an atmosphere of decent western integrity. Only Messrs. Cassar and Mifsud, greeting him with a concerned air as he emerged from the bowels of the ship, reminded him of Port Said. Even they were white-robed saints compared with the rest of them. They received his laconic reports of the *Alceste's* inevitable disintegration with a grave solicitude.

"I give her one trip to Salonika," he said, "and then you'll have to get her overhauled. *Where* you can get her overhauled and *how* I don't know. They haven't the steel in Alexandria. They haven't the men in Suez. It's a month's work at least and ten thousand pound won't pay for it."

"Ah!" Cassar and Mifsud gazed at each other, aware of the truth at last.

"What are you beefing about?" snarled Stephan, struggling out of the boiler suit and stepping clear. "You've made three times that already. You'll make thirty times that when she's had some new frames and ceilings. It's murder to send men to sea in her the way she is now."

Fortunately the captain and crew were out of earshot, but Mifsud, the elder man and more timid, somewhat nervous about this business of owning a ship (which

sailed out of sight, and left you in a ruinous sweat for weeks), shuddered his way to the saloon door and closed it.

Night came, and the searchlight, hung in a large box on the starboard side of the bow, to conceal the beam from Turkish flying patrols riding in from El Arish, showed up the stone-boats sharp and clear, and the figures on the tug standing by the hawsers. Stephan looked into the spare room under the poop they had prepared for him and announced that he would sleep in a hammock on deck.

He lay watching the ineffable stars over the desert. Out there keen-eyed horsemen saw the faint efflorescence of the Canal traffic through powerful German binoculars. It was their plan to cut this spinal cord of the empire, leaving England crippled and spent. Not so easy, Stephan thought, with exultation. By air they might cause a stoppage, bombing a ship in the dredged channel. By a fluke. Potting pilots with rifle fire meant nothing—except to the pilots—and by heavens, some of those fat Frenchmen needed a prod or two. . . .

And on His grave, with quiet eyes,
The Syrian stars look down.

H-m! They were looking down on more than Jesus Christ's grave now. Stephan had seen some snapshots taken from a Turkish prisoner and he remembered them. There was one which made everybody ask, "What's it supposed to be, do you think?" And the prisoner had told them. It was a picture of the valley near Ascalon, where the Yorkshires and Dorsetshires were trapped. The bundles of sticks, which aroused so much

curiosity, he explained, were their skeletons. MacTaggart had had a piece of poetry about that:

It dawns in Asia, tombstones show
And Shropshire names are read;
And the Nile spills his overflow
Beside the Severn's dead.

Look down! Stephan thought of other pictures in that young Turk's wallet—a village in Anatolia like a shambles, with a smashed mother and child smeared over the ground. British air raid, said the prisoner, smiling with his dark glittering eyes blinking at them. He had been in Damascus too, and one of his finest efforts was a row of gibbets, with venerable Armenians, in long white nightgowns, hanging in the air, hands bound behind them, tongues (if you looked close) sticking out in derision of Islam. The smart officer posing below in khaki, with Sam Browne belt and astrakhan cap, was the Great Pasha. The big fellow beside him was Von der Goltz.

Ah, when would the great purge be over, and the nations, cleansed of their illusions, go forward to their destinies once more? Stephan lay wondering. Men were rotten material nowadays, he reflected. He was forever cursing the neutrals and their knavish tricks, but Lord help us with the home-grown variety. A man nowadays didn't go to sea to learn his trade and get the habits of discipline. No, he joined a trade union and discussed the rights of the proletariat with the captain! Only the other day they had had to put a whole crew in prison. Refused duty because the R. T. O. declined to approve overtime pay at a shilling an hour for boat and ammunition drill, which was for their own safety. It was

incredible unless you went aboard and heard the tripe they talked. The transports had the riffraff of the country in them now—school teachers working as firemen to dodge the trenches, clerks and labourers serving King and Country on ships and complaining about the food, which was three times the home rations. Rotten material. "We're serving our country, sir," said one of them to the R. T. O., and how was he doing it? Only by selling the ship's meat to the Jews in Salonika, dropping quarter beeves over the side at night.

Base life was demoralizing, Stephan decided, listening to the whistles passing between bridge and tug, with occasional rings of the telegraph. He thought of Anastasia Callisthenes. Did he really dislike her? Or was it a sort of reaction to the sex lure of the woman? Suppose now . . . He tried to imagine things so remodelled that he could feel at ease in her aggressively seductive presence. She had said she was going for a walk that evening; but of course she had changed her mind. After the tea on the *Cardiganshire* they would go round and inspect the funk-hole. He swerved away from the thought that when he was working late at the office next week he would be near Anastasia at the Marina while Ethel would be in the flat. That was a puny devil compared with some of the demons he had throttled. He didn't want her, he wanted his wife. But his wife's ideas were beyond him. Why had she adopted that cold supercilious attitude toward him when he displayed the emotion which, after all, was supposed to be the basis of marriage? Stephan knew the world was changing. He wanted it to change. It was time he and his class came out to take charge. Rotten at the top and rotten below; the "army of blackguards commanded by gentlemen" had become a mob of

trade unionists nagged at by genteel snobs. But he had no suspicion that Ethel was changing, inside, from the Ethel of Sefton Park. He simply blamed himself for failing to understand a woman. Still, a woman might take a shot at understanding her husband, what? He wondered a while.

He fell asleep as the *Alceste* reached the lakes.

The morning was a birth into a new world for him. Suez, as most people in the world don't know, is not on the Canal. Port Tewfik, looking like a Dutch town on the bank, nestled under its neat rows of trees, while the sun blazed upon Suez amid her gardens a mile or more away. South lay the Gulf and the stark mountains of Sinai. After Port Said Stephan experienced a sober thrill. He shaved in the captain's room and took a fresh suit of drill from his kit bag.

"Now, Mister Lieutenant," said Mr. Cassar at the door as Stephan threaded his epaulettes into the eyeholes on the shoulders, "we can't allow you to do this for nothing. We have to send Mrs. Rumford a little present."

"Well, if you feel bad about it, you can give Mrs. Rumford a little present," said Stephan with a sarcastic intonation. "But don't run away with the idea that I am going to recommend this ship for more than one voyage. What are you going to give her?" he asked suddenly.

Mr. Cassar waved his fingers.

"Just a leetle trinket from the bazaar in Cairo," he explained.

Stephan shrugged his shoulders into his tunic, unfolded a fresh handkerchief, threw the soiled things into his bag and closed it. He thought, "He doesn't understand we must have petrol in Salonika."

"Get her loaded as soon as you can," he advised, lighting a cigarette, "and impress it upon all hands that there must be no smoking while the hatches are off in Port Said. You will get a hundred barrels of castor oil from the Dutch tanker."

They put him ashore and he made for the R. N. O.'s office on the Canal bank. A young naval writer told him the *Reynard* was out at target practice and would anchor about nine. Meanwhile he could get breakfast at the canteen or join them in the room at the back. The R. N. O. lived in Suez at the hotel.

"Who's the prisoner?" asked Stephan, at breakfast.

"He's a Maltee engineer and he's been worrying to get out of the service for months," said the writer, a serious competent-looking youth.

"So they'll go to a lot of expense kicking him out instead of just letting him go," commented Stephan. His host nodded. It was pleasant to talk to a stranger in the service. Things were quiet in Port Tewfik.

"That's just it, and he isn't really commissioned, either. He's M. F. A. you know, Merchant Fleet Auxiliary. Wears one epaulette on the right shoulder only."

"That's right. They used to call them Merely Fooling About, but that's a libel. They're good men."

"So's this fellow Marcù a good man. One of the best engine-fitters the Khedivial Mail shops ever turned out."

"Well, what's the answer?" said Stephan, looking round for some more coffee.

"I don't know the answer," said the youth, "but I know what Marcù will do. He will go straight to Alexandria and start with the Khedivial at fifteen pounds a week instead of the thirteen pounds a month he's get-

ting on the *Rostock*. He's on that captured German, you know."

Stephan was sent off to the anchored *Reynard*, a pre-war cruiser with six-inch guns and light armour amidships, in a steam launch whose polished brass funnel was one man's work to keep clean. Three more men were on the gangway polishing the stanchions, and Stephan's seaman's eye noted the spotless slots of the great teak grating from which he stepped, saluting the deck on which, in theory, Nelson died. Stephan was aware of the grotesque quality of these traditional fetishes, but he would say to himself, "What can you put in their place?" It isn't the act, it is the idea behind the act. The three white bands of braid on the leathernecks' collars, imitated by nearly every navy, meant something "for us." Little Jew boys in Chicago learned Shakespeare's tongue in school, and on Sundays they would be decked out in sailor's dress with the three white bands which stood for Nelson's three victories, of which they would never hear. More than that, they would wear black silk scarfs under the collars and never know it was in perpetual mourning for the mighty dead. What of it? They were not *us*, thought Stephan.

He saluted. There was a living officer there, however, and he led the way to the wardroom. In the wardroom was the court. The commander of the *Reynard* was president, and with him and Stephan sat the engineer-lieutenant of a destroyer in dockyard hands at Alexandria. At the other end of the table was the prisoner with "the prisoner's friend," who in this case was a thin-faced surgeon. Grouped on one side was a startling array of natives, witnesses for the prosecution, and a person with

a fez on his knee, who regarded the court with the unabashed impudence of the professional Levantine interpreter.

Stephan listened to the charge, that Mr. Giovanni Marcù, M. F. A., did, while attending the wedding of one Achmet Abdulla Hassan Bey in Suez, become intoxicated and conduct himself in a manner unbecoming an officer and a gentleman, and did further assault one Hassan Abdullah Ali Bey, another guest, striking him on the head with a champagne bottle, so that said bottle was broken and said guest, Hassan Abdullah Ali Bey, received cuts and contusions from which he was not yet at date of writing recovered.

"Plenty of beys," thought Stephan, and made a mark or two on his writing pad. The court called the witnesses for the assault, and one by one they stood up and swore on the Qoran to tell the truth. The interpreter stood with them, and sentence by sentence he drew out the tale while the robed and tarbooshed group caught and flung back his swift interpolations amid spurts of guttural laughter.

"Order in the court," remarked the president, tapping his pencil on the inkpot. Two marines, one on either side of the prisoner, squared their shoulders and glared at the dark-faced men about them. "Order in the court. Repeat that statement again."

"Achmet Abdulla Hassan Bey says he did not see the prisoner kiss the bottle before he threw it."

"Why didn't he?"

There was a conference in Arabic, in which the prisoner joined. and evoked a shrill yelp of delight from a witness.

"What does he say?" demanded the president angrily

of the interpreter, who immediately assumed a wooden expression.

"He say he was lying down. It was a wedding party," he muttered. To this the prisoner added a brief comment. The president stared at these people. What the devil did the authorities mean by having such a man in the navy?

"Well, does the prisoner admit having assaulted the complainant?" he asked at length. To this Giovanni Marcù, who besides being an expert mechanic and a first-class watch keeper, spoke English, French, Greek, Arabic, Italian, and Maltese, turned his lowering features to the other end of the table for the first time.

"I admit nothing at all," he informed them calmly. "That is for you." He turned again to the grouped natives and remarked in their tongue:

"Watch with care, O my brothers, how I deal with these men of no understanding."

"I would advise the prisoner's friend," said the president, "to remind the prisoner that he is an officer, and——"

"That is not true," broke in the prisoner. "When I ask for commission, your people chase me out. They say, 'What, a dago like you have a commission!' So they give me one epaulette"; here he pulled it off and let it drop on the table. "One only. I am same as fireman. Now I have a good time and get in a fight, you say I am officer." He turned to the interpreter with a gesture of authority, "Muhammid, ask Abdullah Bey to speak the truth in his tongue, that three days since we renewed our friendship in my father's house. He knows well that when men drink wine they do foolish things. Has he not seen this Englishman, sitting as a judge over me, carried through

Suez by his men? Did not that other one last night sleep in the Arab Quarter? Speak, Muhammid, and finish the matter."

"Abdullah Bey says," began the interpreter in a professional singsong, "that he does not know why he is here——"

"He is here because he is a witness in a charge against an officer," returned the president sharply.

"Abdullah Bey says," repeated Muhammid woodenly, "he is sorry because he called his friend Giovanni Marcù the son of a bitch."

"What's this?" called the Court, and the Marines became rigid. "Mr. Marcù is the prisoner, not the complainant."

"Abdullah Bey says," went on Muhammid, "when a man drinks wine his senses leave him. He does not remember any more."

"Evidently," muttered the Court, eyeing them all with some disfavour and not at all certain which Abdullah Bey was being quoted. "The point the Court wishes to establish is whether the prisoner became intoxicated and was otherwise guilty of conduct unbecoming an officer."

"The prisoner's principal argument, as far as I can make out, Mr. President"—it was the lean surgeon-lieutenant who was speaking—"is that he has never had the status of an officer and therefore it is scarcely just—in his view, I mean—that he should be answerable to a code which fails to accord him that status."

"I see." The naval man looked at the Harley Street man for an instant and then dropped his eyes upon his pad. "The point, however, is not allowed. For the purpose of this court the prisoner is an officer."

"Another point," went on the prisoner's friend, "is

that he has given no cause for complaint in carrying out his duties as a junior engineer on the *Rostock* since his appointment."

"The point," said the Court, "is not relevant to the charge and cannot be allowed."

"Finally," concluded the doctor with a slight cough, "it is submitted that the prisoner, owing to his knowledge of languages, is of great service to his ship and that, in view of the attitude of the injured party, a reprimand would be an adequate punishment."

"It is impossible," said the president, "for the Court to allow any such consideration to influence the Court's decision concerning an officer's conduct. The Court is satisfied from the evidence that the prisoner did become intoxicated and conducted himself in a manner unbecoming an officer in His Majesty's Navy. It is the Court's decision that the prisoner be dismissed from the Service as from to-day. The interpreters will inform the complainant and witnesses of the decision."

"Allah is great," snored Muhammid through his nose, turning to the Abdullahs and their friends. "The Englishman who is the judge has rewarded the prisoner with freedom. No longer will he be compelled to serve for little pay in the English ship. He goes back to his friends in Iskanderieh and will earn much money."

"It is well. The judge is a just judge," came from the group in solemn tones, and they arranged their robes. Their fierce dark eyes burned as they regarded the stiff forbidding faces of the Englishmen. The prisoner's friend walked up the room and waited for the Court to rise.

Stephan stood irresolutely for a moment, dazed by the peculiar nature of his emotions. The expression on the

doctor's face arrested him. One would have imagined that he had been sentenced and the Maltee, now moving out among the natives, had won his suit. Together he and Stephan went up to that deck upon which, in a symbolical sense, Nelson had died. It was a sort of naval transubstantiation, possibly. An officer with his monocled eye gazing at Suez was the incarnation of England's Mighty Dead. It transpired that the doctor was also going ashore and together they descended to the launch.

No wonder the R. N. O. didn't worry about his—Stephan's—lack of experience in court trials! What experience does one need to sit like a stuffed sweating image in a hot wardroom and listen to somebody else give a decision? And the justice of it struck Stephan as too star-chamberish to go down these days. True enough that the only person injured was the *Rostock's* chief engineer, who had lost a good and valued member of his staff. But what staggered Stephan was the woodenness of it all, the fantastical lack of common or garden intelligence on the part of these people on the deck on which Nelson had symbolically died.

Ashore he and the doctor went into Suez to drink beer at the hotel bar. On a raised and shaded terrace they sat alone and Stephan received a high-priced professional man's opinion of the whole affair. Not for publication. It certainly aligned with his own. The president of the court had not even looked at him during the whole proceedings. The doctor nodded.

"The court! The court!" he mimicked. "You see the whole thing is, they are simply furious because they have to let us in at all. The people at home insist on it. They regard the navy as a sort of preserve of their own. They stuck at nothing at first to keep us out. In

1914 they were turning down men who were physically perfect except for a hole in one tooth or a bunion on one toe. I've seen them doing it, when we needed men, men, men. What did they care?"

They drank their beer. High up in the blue air planes swerved and toppled in dizzy stunts over the flying field.

"I wonder what those Arabs were jabbering about among themselves," said Stephan.

"That's another thing," said the surgeon gravely. "What do you suppose these natives think of such a piece of idiocy as we saw this morning? That chap Marcù is really one of them. He's an Egyptian and as much a fellow-national as a Welshman or Scotchman is to us. They'll hang together. Do you suppose, if he'd been on a spree as a civilian, he would have talked like that in the *Tribunaux Mixtes?* The case would have never come up, of course. What did it all amount to, beyond that he got stewed? Where's your ship?"

"I'm not on a ship," said Stephan. "I'm in Port Said. N. E. O."

"I see. Lucky chap. They tell me the—you know—is out."

"She is," said Stephan, "and we jolly well ought to hear something soon. Shall we have lunch? I'll get the train this afternoon to Zagazig. Are you from Alexandria?"

"I'm really on leave for a few days. I've applied for exchange into a home ship. They ought to have a malarial expert in my place. I'm a surgeon."

"And I suppose you get whacking big fees at home?" said Stephan wistfully. The surgeon's thin face looked grave.

"Enormous," he said, and smiled. "More than I get

in the service, anyhow! That's why I understood that young Maltee. He wants to marry—his family live out in the country—and it is impossible on his screw on the *Rostock*."

"Who's he going to marry?" asked Stephan idly.

"She's in Port Said," said the surgeon. "So he told me. A Miss Merola. Father's a chemist."

"Are you sure?" asked Stephan. "I wonder if it's the Merola girl I know. That's rather interesting. I must say I didn't expect to hear she was engaged to a Maltee, although she's one herself. I'm not sorry. Some of our chaps hang round the cash desk in that shop when she's there."

"Yes, I know," said the surgeon. "It reminds me of what they say at home when a squad of territorials marches down the street—*Thank God for the Navy.* That's what the dago girls say in Alexandria. Let's have lunch."

Stephan, in the hot train to Zagazig, began to wonder what was going on in Port Said. Probabilities swelled up, like genie out of uncorked bottles, in his mind. Ranciulli now. And how much was true of Merola's selling heroin and hashish to officers? The police chief, Bek'ahri Bey, had stated in set terms that two supposed Arabs in Merola's shop had been identified as sergeants from the camp in the docks, masquerading in native dress and purchasing dope to have a grand debauch in Arabtown. The difficulty was increased because one of the sergeants was a novelist who had been severely punished for sending an article to the *Daily Mail* in which he declared that the Turks were getting ready to cut the Canal. The other sergeant was a professor of ancient history at Ox-

ford University who had been wounded in the head on the beaches at Gallipoli. They lived, the two of them, in a tent on the sands between the Chérif Basin and Lake Menzaleh, and were famous for concocting the foulest limericks, Latin and English, in the land of Egypt. Why this should increase the difficulty was revealed when a new broom rashly interrogated the pair in the provost-marshal's office. As Bek'ahri Bey said, "Whenever you dig, you find an officer." And this time it was a colonel attached to the base, a director of a huge army contracting company in Birmingham, an old friend of these two, who had made a practice of joining them on their Arabian expeditions. Which showed how complex life was in a small place. If this Maltee engineer married his Port Said girl, what sort of respect would the two of them have for *us?* And their children growing up in a self-conscious Egypt . . . Stephan frowned. They would regard us with contempt.

All the more reason for stern measures, he believed. As if we hadn't a tough enough job to box up the Central Powers without having a lot of abominable scandals sapping our prestige among these people!

Always, beneath these apprehensions streaming through his mind, flowed his own personal misery. Ethel. He half wished he were a Catholic, like Bannister, and could go to a priest with his trouble. What was a husband's duty in such a situation? Because he only half-believed in the genuineness of her motives. Not that he believed for a single moment that even a *thought* of unfaithfulness had ever crossed Ethel's mind; but nevertheless if there was an explanation he wasn't in possession of it. Good God! And he was supposed to be the most fortunate naval officer in the service, who not only

slept with his wife every night but had her with him in a snug shore billet. Showed you how little the world knew.

The train, creaking to a stop in the station behind the town, reminded him of the present. It was twelve-thirty. An enormous red moon like a glowing copper disk hung over Lake Menzaleh. The hotels were full. He discovered that going to the flat was a more complicated business than he had imagined, with this strange under-current of misery running through his mind. What was the use of going to sleep with a wife in Ethel's frame of mind? Suppose he went, and if she were awake, and anyhow he would wake her ringing the bell, suggested he spend the night in the office. What would she say? Very likely she would do what she did last night—shrug her shoulders and look away from him. Damn all women! he muttered, and told the cab driver to go to the Place Abbas.

What was the matter with her lately? he asked himself. Was she trying to drive him to "take an interest," as they say, in Anastasia? Was it that? Had she some obscure woman's reason for holding him off? He could think of nothing. He held privately the belief that "if she loved another man, she'd tell me at once," and corollary to this was his conviction that if he himself "ever loved another woman he would tell Ethel at once." These were vague distant possibilities of course. They were like his belief in the Second Coming of Christ and the ultimate End of the British Empire—naïve and shadowy convictions of far-off contingencies. In real life, one had to bear and forbear, give and forgive. His theory of marriage was that of a Christian gentleman, and Christian gentlemen suffered in silence so long as the sanctity

of the marriage tie was held inviolate. Perhaps he had better go to the office without disturbing Ethel, according to the precepts of a Christian gentleman. As it was, he would have to wake her up. Perhaps Anastasia had remained with her. No; Eleutherios would take Anastasia's attention. Anastasia was one of those women who seem to proceed on the principle that, having begotten a lawful child and bestowed upon it every secular care, she was free to indulge her own desires. She would tuck up her little dago kid all comfy and then come out and try to get a Christian gentleman's soul and body into her possession, even though the gentleman's wife was her own best friend.

He roused from his thoughts as the cab rolled in the deep dust of the Rue d'Arsenal. The police station was on the left. Stephan leaned forward. A light burned in the office and another, carefully lowered, in the entrance. He saw the tall form of Bek'ahri Bey rise in silhouette against the blind. A hand reached out from beyond, the hand and arm of a woman with a lighted match that touched the police chief's cigarette. Stephan tapped the driver on the back and the man pulled up with a faint tinkle of harness. Stephan, telling him to wait, got out.

A Sudanese, his tunic unbuttoned and his boots unlaced, was stretched on a form. He rose as Stephan came in. He laced his boots and fastened one button before taking in the lieutenant's name. Stephan stared at a boldly printed notice headed "SPIES." It was a warning to all enlisted men in every branch of the service to be on the watch against spies. At the foot of it was the pious aspiration, *God Save the King*. Stephan yawned. Men didn't *know* they were talking. The most inexpert spy could get most men to gabble all they knew. Look at

himself. Confiding in Bannister, who was a chum of Ranciulli! The door opened. He was shown into an office with one bright light over the desk, behind which sat Bek'hari Bey. In a chair on the policeman's left, thrust into a shadow which sharpened the glow of her cigarette, was a woman in black. Across her face was a white muslin scarf such as the dancers in Cairo wore in their provocative promenades. Her silken legs were crossed and the white insteps of her sharp black shoes were revealed to the lieutenant. He said:

"I'm intruding."

"Not a bit of it," said the policeman. He stood easily as Stephan found a chair. He held out his hand toward the woman. "This lady has been making a communication. I would have asked her to retire, but you had better hear her story before I go to Navy House."

Stephan, cap under his arm, heels together, bowed to the vague figure behind the gleaming silken hocks and white insteps, and took his seat. He said nothing. He thought, "She's one of those . . . Not the Bey's of course . . . Navy House, eh, eh? Well, he gets nothing out of me about anything until I know where I am. I've made a fool of myself enough, giving credit . . ."

He heard the bey say, casually, holding a page of a small notebook between his first and second fingers:

"Dig and you find an officer. What am I to do with this, Lieutenant?"

Stephan, taking it and smoothing it out, was thinking:

"He doesn't let it change his views of the British. He was trained by us himself. No, it's our temporary rotters he writes off as bad debts! That's out of old Swaff's washing-book. Little blue leather thing with squared

India paper. What's it say? *Homs 450 K. D. ditto K.*" Involuntarily he held the thing to his nose and looked at the woman.

"Madame Ernestine brought that to me here," explained the policeman. "Tell the lieutenant where you found it," he added.

The woman leaned forward and suddenly appeared in the light of the desk lamp. She removed the semi-transparent *yashmak* entirely and took a long inhalation, expelling the smoke in straight jets from her nostrils. Her bright dark face shone like those painted on the lids of mummy cases. She looked at Stephan unwinkingly, without any expression save a sort of sexless curiosity. She knew him for one of those who had no traffic with the women. And her flexile intellect found time to hover over the problem confronting him when he reached home.

"I am from Homs," she said in a low clear voice, dropping her eyes. "I live in the Place Abbas. There I have an *appartement*. I come to my 'ouse this evening and I ascend." She made a gesture to indicate going up in the lift. "I have a friend who is to come to see me, you understand, at seven o'clock. He also is from Homs. I reached my *appartement*. As I put in the key I see on the floor that piece of paper. I pick it up—that is natural. I read the name: Homs. It is my city. My father, my mother and—and all my family are at Homs. The other writing I do not know. When my friend come I show him the paper, and he is frightened. He say to me, 'You had better take this to the police. It will be safer for us both!' I do not understand, but as he work in offiss I tell him 'All right, George, I will take it to Bek'ahri Bey.' And I come here when nobody see me."

She took another long pull at her cigarette and slowly raised her eyes to the man at the desk. Stephan watched her. He was able to discern the policeman's desire to pass the responsibility on to the navy. The problem was staggering. You couldn't pooh-pooh it. The girl was too sharp to be fooled. She might not know what the notes signified; but how did one know she didn't know? How could one be sure her friend George, whoever he might be, who worked in an "offiss," hadn't understood? She said he had been frightened. But his fright might be just the average Levantine's terror of trouble with the police. And then . . . Stephan involuntarily looked at Bek'ahri Bey, who was staring at him with a smile of comprehension. He saw that Stephan had just realized the crux of the problem, which was that this demi-mondaine who had done the right thing, the loyal thing, the irreproachable thing, might nevertheless have already tipped off someone who would know just what to do with that information.

"The *Ben-ma-chree* went out two hours ago," said the chief of police steadily.

That, thought Stephan, only made the thing more difficult to unravel. Had she held the thing up until it was too late to change the raid? Had she? Stephan did not dare look at her for fear his thought would show in his face. He was thinking of Swaffham diving into the house in the Place Abbas that morning. What a kettle of fish to carry to Navy House and dump on the R. N. O.'s desk. Then *Ben-ma-chree* was a twenty-seven knot ship. She could do twenty-eight. She carried four planes. At twenty-seven knots she would be abeam of Tripoli at seven in the morning. The flight was a matter of half an hour at most from there. Well, it was up to

the air people to call it off. Stephan thought: Old Swaff was on the *Ben-ma-chree*, flight commander. In one of his few bursts of oratory he had mumbled that Homs was lousy with Turkish *matériel*. He had been over it with a photographer. Swaffham was an old fool. This piece was handsome enough. But what about that Merola girl? Was he running a harem? Not like Swaff. At last Stephan answered Bek'ahri Bey.

"What do you want me to do? Take her to the R. N. O.? It's a military matter, isn't it?"

The police chief, rising, came out from behind his desk and stood, very white and tall, in front of a dark teak cabinet. He shook his head.

"Her friend George has been here, too, Lieutenant. He recognizes the paper and handwriting."

"George? What's his other name? Yakoub?"

"Exactly. Now you see the matter in the correct proportions, Lieutenant."

Was that so? Stephan asked himself savagely. So it was Master Yakoub, the very quiet, efficient clerk in his own office, who was the lover of this handsome girl. Stephan suddenly realized he had taken Mr. Yakoub very much for granted. Here he was being rather offensively loyal. How was one to know how genuine he was? The whole business at Homs would be over before a man could do anything. Those planes on the *Ben-ma-chree* were the only four fast modern fighting machines in Port Said. Allenby was going to change that; but even Allenby couldn't shift that lot of big-buttocked, red-tabbed, brass-hatted guzzlers in Cairo. Not for a while yet, anyhow, by God!

He heard himself saying that he would go with the lady to the R. N. O. He would have to phone him first

though. He might be lying down. . . . That George Yakoub must be damned observant to recognize this piece of squared paper. Ah, but it was Swaff's peculiar fist he recognized. Swaffham sent notes to the office, with O. H. M. S. on them, On His Majesty's Service. He often omitted the stops. And OHMS in Swaff's spidery scrawl was easily recognized in HOMS. Swaff was a fool, all right.

Stephan loosened another button of his tunic and glanced at the electric fan. It needed new brushes. It was spinning in a spasmodically futile fashion. No wind.

"Well," he said. He rose and gave the chief of police a sharp look. "I suppose I'll turn in some time. We can take my carriage."

Bek'ahri Bey opened the door for the lady. Madame Ernestine floated forward on her high-heeled French shoes, arranging her *yashmak*. Stephan caught the gleam of light on her silken ankles as she went through the door which Bek'ahri Bey closed with a soft mutter of Arabic.

"Lieutenant," he said in a low tone, "to-night we arrested three men in Arab clothes in a cab outside the Constantinople Divan for Officers. One of them was Ibrahim Farag, who works for Ranciulli Bey. The others are from the transport *Cardiganshire*, Captain Bannister. If we hold these two men, who have brought hashish from Aden, we delay the ship and the naval transport officer will make a complaint that the local authorities are coöperating with the enemy. If I let them go I must let the other man go too."

"What do you expect me to do? Why don't you see the N. T. O.?" asked Stephan. He stood with his feet wide apart, looking down at the tessellated floor. He yawned.

He was suddenly so tired he wanted to lie down on the lounge behind him. To sleep! To forget this unrelenting pressure of iniquity! His thoughts were confused for a moment; silken ankles and hashish, English fools and enemy neutrals. He heard the bey say, drily:

"The N. T. O. is not an easy officer to explain my position to. Captain Beecham thinks the French are also to blame. And if I go to Admiral Pommelet, who is the superior officer, the N. T. O. will be angry again. I don't expect you to do anything, Lieutenant. I mention it because you know Ranciulli Bey and Captain Bannister. Hashish is coming in and my business is to stop it."

"You mean you want me to see Bannister, so he won't complain if you hold his men? Yes, I will. Bannister can get men at Port Tewfik. There are several waiting to go back to India. They've been in hospital. Besides, who are the men? On deck?"

"Second steward and an engineer."

Stephan thought again. Bannister would be annoyed. He decided that Bannister needed a little annoyance. Bannister would go on and on, comfortably enjoying the war, until he got into trouble. It might make him understand that Ranciulli wasn't the right chum for a ship master.

"He'll have to lump it if he doesn't like it," he muttered. "I'll drop him a hint."

He turned to the telephone. While he waited for the connection his eyes fell on the hood of the carriage outside. He strained to make out why it moved. The driver was turning half-round on his box and was talking to Madame Ernestine. Stephan saw her cigarette glowing. It dawned on him that he had a lot to do yet. The consequences——

"Yes, sir, Lieutenant Stephan speaking from Bek'ahri Bey's office. Very urgent. Yes, sir. At once. At my office? Yes, sir . . . Yes, sir."

"He was not lying down then," smiled the policeman. "He seems never to sleep."

That was true, thought Stephan, with a sudden warm glow at his heart. He said, buttoning up his tunic:

"You hold that Farag. I've been trying to catch that swine for weeks. You hold him. He's up to something more than a few okes of hashish, you mark my words. I'll get this out of the way first. We will want to interrogate your Farag."

"And the other men?"

"Yes, the other men, too, damn them!"

As he bent his head to enter the carriage he found himself assailed by a strong seductive perfume. He was aware of Madame Ernestine drawing her body away to make room for him, but the perfume belied the movement. She was one of those women who take men captive by subtle arts. Stephan perceived, as in a dark mirror, the problem of Swaffham and Pretty Dick. He experienced a sudden savage envy of them and a savage anger against women, delicate fragile animals luring men from their work, destroying them before one's very face. He sat with arms folded rigidly as the carriage rolled through the dust of the Rue el Tegara. He was aware of her presence beside him as of a disturbing and unfamiliar thought. She reminded him of something he wanted to obliterate, the image in his mind of Anastasia on her balcony over the Canal, of Anastasia suddenly pressing his face against the odorous plenitude of her breasts while she sighed, "My life iz waste' in zis place!"

Out of the corner of his eye he saw the girl looking at

him. She moved with sinuous softness, turning her body toward him as though in a cocoon of silken darkness. He knew she was going to speak, but he did not know how to prevent her, or how to diminish the impression she would make on his tormented senses. The sight of her cigarette reminded him of Ethel sitting up in bed and murmuring that it was "quite impossible. . . ." That made him think of Ethel's severe judgment upon old Swaffham for getting mixed up with that dago girl, meaning Miss Merola of the English pharmacy. What would she say when she learned the truth? She wouldn't learn it from him! He heard Ernestine breathing words softly close to his ear.

"Mister Lieutenant, you think my friend, who work in offiss, give me good advice to visit Bek'ahri Bey?"

Her bright dark face was close to his own. As she moved, the perfume came to him in waves from her garments. The clarity of her tones, the beauty of voice that comes from perfect teeth and the mastery of many languages, oppressed him by its appeal to some obscure instinct in his heart. It was as though Anastasia possessed the magical power to invest other women with her own glamour, so that his soul might not escape her. He pictured her asleep, that black hair of hers awash on the pillow, on her face a smile as she dreamed, while this Syrian woman impersonated her.

The carriage stopped. Ahead was the vague emptiness of the sky over the Canal. Stephan did not speak. He got out and told the driver to come back in half an hour. No; he was to go away, down the Rue Sultan Osman, and come back in half an hour. The man's face showed up suddenly in the faint light of his carriage lamp as he bent down, the fez on his head at an angle. It was the

last image on Stephan's retina before he was in the dark, Madame Ernestine's hand reaching to his arm for guidance. Anastasia, asleep across the street, was reaching out for him now.

He steadied himself on the first step of the stairway. The R. N. O. was not here yet. Automatically he took the woman's arm to assist her. He sensed the significance of this. Ascending together! An upper chamber. What was that now? Ah, the Holy Spirit, in tongues of fire . . . Not the only occupant of an upper chamber! He felt her drag a little at his arm.

"Mister Lieutenant, there is somesing else."

"What do you mean, something else?" he snapped. She had halted, halfway up. She was breathing quickly close to his lips, standing on the step above him. Her hand rested on his shoulder.

Who teaches foreign women all their tricks? he asked himself miserably. He felt as though Anastasia were more seductive in this woman than in her own person. This was Anastasia stripped of little Eleutherios and the conventions of the colonel's lady. Sisters under their skins! Yes, by Jove! He looked at her savagely and took her hand from his shoulder. She bent her head and bit his hand gently. He felt faint.

"Somesing else," she crooned in his ear. "You 'ave the *appartement* next me. To-night I 'ear your wife on the telephone. She no understand the walls of that 'ouse very thin. She talk an' talk on the telephone."

"Who?" he demanded, and he had a desire to kill this woman whose voice gurgled like a rill.

"Ah!" she said. "How do I know? Some man she love! I 'ear her laugh, Mister Lieutenant."

"You don't know what you're talking about!" He

flung away from her and paused, feeling her come softly near him again, smiling in the dark.

"My friend George know what I am talking about," she whispered. "He work in your offiss. You sink I am 'is sweet'eart. No! We 'ave family friends at Homs. He tell me to-night you very good boss, Mister Lieutenant. He sorry for you. . . ."

He thought he would never reach the landing. He could get no sort of order into his brain. It spun as he put the key in the door and flung it open. Why didn't the R. N. O. come? He paused to wipe his face and heard her voice, softly sibilant.

"I make too much trouble for you, Mister Lieutenant? Pardon——"

"Make all the trouble you like, but leave Mrs. Rumford out of it." He closed the doors and switched on the light. She was smiling. She leaned forward and made a gesture of holding a telephone receiver.

"She no say Mrs. Rumford to the telephone. I 'ear her: 'Oh, yess! Oh, who iss that? Oh, yess! Ethel speaking.' And then, 'ha-ha-ha!' she laugh so 'appy."

She turned her back on him and, dropping her veil, her hand on her hip, she looked at him over her shoulder provocatively, as Anastasia might have looked, the curve of her breast accentuated by her pose. He felt helpless before this incarnation of Anastasia who was so experienced in men, who could bite his hand and make him thrill with desire for—for . . .

Now what was it? he asked himself as he sat in his chair behind his desk, laying his cap on the papers on one side, going through the formal business of bureaucracy to recover his nerves. What was it he desired? Not Anastasia herself, or this dangerous demi-mondaine, who

wanted to get him in her power for some reason of her own. No, it was—it was—something Ethel didn't give him. Something the foreign women knew and understood. "Glamour" might have been the word, had he known it. He had heard MacTaggart on the subject and heard him impatiently, being then new-married and full of proud illusions. MacTaggart had said, in his characteristically epigrammatic Scot's bass, that love in the northern countries was romantic, but south and east of the blue Mediterranean it was necromantic. Something about the "mistresses of the black arts." Queer bird, MacTaggart! He was one of the faithful, though! In Cairo now with an attaché case full of documents to torment the High Commissioner. Black art was what this Ernestine possessed. MacTaggart had used the phrase in one of his rather boring essays Stephan had seen in a magazine: "the glamorous eyes of Coptic maidens." Queer bird. Did he by any chance know so much about Coptic maidens, whatever they might be?

Stephan fumbled with the office inkwells. He caught sight of Mr. Yakoub's chair and the covered typewriter, the screen that hid him from the drawing room beyond. Oh, so that was it! He leaned forward a little. Yakoub could squint through the hinged crack of the screen. Well, he would, matriculation or no matriculation. And hand on what he saw and heard to this . . .

She sat before him now as though she had come in very truth to demand his soul. She smiled prettily, endearingly, unable to comprehend why he did not take up her challenge. She knew Englishmen well enough to doubt whether he perceived how she had elaborated a tiny suspicion of Yakoub's into a circumstantial story about

the *madama*. She saw him gnawing his thumb and scowling at the blotter. He was like that other lieutenant, she thought, from whose pocket-wallet she had taken the little notebook of blue leather. A faint tremor passed through her body. Homs. On the wall by her side was a proclamation with the letters "OHMS" at the top. What was that now? she thought, looking with her dark bright smile at the lieutenant, the friend of the other who had taken to hashish lately? He had come to her, head bent forward, eyes on the ground, following her out of the Eldorado Café. She had been extraordinarily discreet, warning her friend Neirreddin Bey that she must have privacy for this animal. She made smart clothes *pour les dames*, including the fat-legged daughters of Ranciulli Bey. But the *lieutenant des avions* was a bore. He, too, scowled and understood nothing of the nature of love. She had given him some of her cigarettes impregnated with the drug, charging him a high price. She had added to that price when he came for more, explaining how dangerous it was to procure them. He had discovered, of course, that he could get them himself at Merola's and courted the little Maltee daughter as an excuse for going there. But he smoked them at Ernestine's *appartement*, more and more heavily. Now it was all over, of course. She watched this lieutenant steadily. He would not be so easy. Neirreddin Bey had called him a stupid swine. She had heard he hated the natives. Only because she had heard that she tried her arts. George Yakoub's story was enough to go on. When this one got home to the Place Abbas he would find plenty to interest him unless that *madama* was clever.

Stephan said in a low clear tone:

"I don't give one damn for all your cock-and-bull yarns. You can tell them to the R. N. O. when he arrives."

"Me?" she pointed her finger at her own bosom. "Me tell . . .? Impossible, Mister Lieutenant." She searched his face for a moment. "Oh!" She clicked her tongue, unable to believe what her shrewdness told her, that he did not know, he did not know. "But why should I tell the—the officer? It is not his *madama* I 'ear on the telephone to-night."

"Then you will confine your conversation to the subject of this inquiry," said Stephan thickly. "I haven't lived in Port Said all this time for nothing."

"No?" she queried in wonder.

"No. You are making a mistake if you think I believe any of you people. I doubt every word you say. You are simply unable to understand what we mean by a plain statement. You—" he reached out his arm and pointed a shaking finger at her—"you have some reason for making all this trouble, just as you have another reason for telling these lies about Mrs. Rumford. You work in the dark, you people. If I had my way I'd lock you up for a few weeks. I——"

He saw the door opening and stood up. He did not see the look in the woman's eyes as she grasped his meaning. He saw only the tall form of the R. N. O. holding open the door for a big bearded person with smoked glasses that showed black on a powder-gray face. Stephan came out from behind his desk, his brain marking time, his face set in a grin that meant nothing save attentive politeness.

Being a Frenchman, the admiral looked at Madame Ernestine at once. To him Stephan was an incomprehensible cog in an alien wheel. Ernestine was the focal

point of an astonishing telephone call in the middle of the night, from the English *capitaine*. After years of duty in Indo-China and on the French Ivory Coast, the admiral was supervising, in a military sense, the operation of the Canal. He did not interpret his duties as including the interrogation of native women at midnight. His conception of military operations in this region was static. He was to preserve the regular traffic of the Canal. The English, on the other hand, were pestilential in their incessant movement. To keep a ship in Port Said for a week, to put a gun on her poop was, in their view, suicidal. The men had to work all night to permit the vessel to sail as soon as she had coaled. He had only that day endured an extraordinary persecution from the English, who wanted to know whether the six big Japanese trawlers he had in harbour would ever be ready for sweeping operations. They added that six months had passed since the arrival of those trawlers and the arrangement had been that the French would participate in sweeping the channel for the lighters to El Arish. Now it appeared that the *capitaine* regarded this latest development as serious. Information had been picked up by this woman of a certain class. A month ago a minute had been presented to him by the British G. H. Q. and Naval Staff, jointly, to the effect that the presence of such women in a military area was prejudicial to the efficiency of the Allied forces. To this Admiral Pommelet had made an evasive and cynical reply, and the subject had been shelved. A transport had been torpedoed outside, the British had taken on the job of bringing her in, and by some technical cleverness had managed to sink her a mile from the mole. There she was, lying on her side in full view of the civilian popula-

tion taking the air between the De Lesseps statue and the lighthouse. They couldn't blame *that* on the women. . . . He sat down heavily, facing this one, *une Syrienne*, as he reflected, while *le capitaine* took the chair at the desk.

Stephan stood at attention. The rooms were hot. He stepped forward into the other room to open the shutters on the street. As he passed Madame Ernestine he saw that her eyes flew from one man to the other. Her breath came in quick pants. Now! he thought as he swung the shutter in the darkness. A great moth roared close to his ear and passed out into the blue night. Once again he had conquered. The thought of her teeth on his hand was exorcised. Across the street Anastasia lay in her high chamber. He had conquered for the present, though! he told himself sternly.

He turned and saw the woman on her feet addressing the admiral in passionate French too swift to understand. If she was a Syrian, he looked like some old Assyrian, with his curling beard and high-crowned shapeless cap embroidered with gold. On his breast was the little red rosette of the Legion of Honour, like a spot of blood on his white tunic. An old Assyrian image with eyes made of disks of onyx, his hairy hands folded on the flamboyant walking stick, he sat motionless as a god. The R. N. O., who took an easy pose anywhere, sat sideways in Stephan's chair, making faint marks on the blotter with the paper knife. Rather clever of the chief, thought Stephan, bringing those two together with a clash. Only, what were they saying? What the hell were they saying? The old Frog croaked "*Pourquoi?*" twice, and the skirt spattered him with her answers. She had her handkerchief out and yet through the tears she

laughed without mirth. She was dramatic as she swung on her high thin heels toward the quiescent males before her. Stephan stood in the dark doorway and watched her. He saw the R. N. O. raise the paper knife and point it at her. He heard the thin precise voice remark that all this didn't explain Alexandria.

Stephan stood perfectly motionless. He saw the woman pause, saw her eyes on the R. N. O. harden and go out. Just like an off-shore light. Occulted. Then on again.

"Alexandria!" she repeated. The R. N. O., playing with the thin brass blade, nodded, with the corners of his reticent mouth drawn. He was like, very like, a thin blade himself.

"Stein's Oriental Stores," he murmured, "send you a lot of dress material, I think."

Stephan heard the girl's shrill squeak, "*Mais oui! Pourquoi non? Je suis une couturière, Monsieur Capitaine!*" and saw her bent body and out-flung hands. He heard the R. N. O. tapping the paper cutter on the glass inkwell faster and faster, say that the girl in Stein's Oriental Store was under arrest and had made a statement.

"She accuse me?" came the shrill notes. Stephan looked on in absorbed ecstasy. The R. N. O. was a downy bird. This was MacTaggart's work. The R. N. O. didn't give her the satisfaction of knowing what the Stein girl had confessed. She'd made a statement. Good, that! MacTaggart must have come back from Cairo.

"No," the R. N. O. merely shook his head and contemplated an intricate arabesque design he was making on the blotter. Nothing had been found here in Port Said. The documents put into the parcels of material for Madame Ernestine of Port Said were removed by some

one in the native post office at—the R. N. O. paused to complete a rather ornate curve—Cairo.

"They go east from there, you know," he added, looking at Admiral Pommelet. "To Suez."

Madame Ernestine sank into her chair and used her handkerchief. The Frenchman's powder-gray face, the cheeks above the great beard looking as though peppered with fine shot, confronted her like an Assyrian stone image. Stephan leaned his forehead against his forearm which lay on the door frame. Suddenly the R. N. O. got up, extraordinarily tall, his white uniform impeccable. The long lean jaws were blue. Eighteen hours, thought Stephan with delight, since the man had shaved, after a plunge into the rollers below the Continental. And wide awake now, by God! How did he fight back these devils that sought a man's soul? He, Stephan, was married, which was supposed to be better than burning. Was it? The chief wasn't married and yet kept them all at a distance. You couldn't even imagine him snooping into Madame Ernestine's, or making a pal of Ranciulli. A lonely life, his. He had an ascetic sort of face, Gamble. People lived in Norfolk; behind high red-brick walls and dense laurel copses in a village called Meddlebury All Saints. Stephan had heard him allude to it once. The old man, Colonel Gamble, was in charge of evacuation of the village in case the Germans landed on the East Coast. The villagers were to march westward into "Holland" and camp at Long Sutton. . . . Stephan thought this place would be hell without him. Ethel admired him so much. Ethel was no fool. She was right about people. He and she might have their differences, but fundamentally . . .

But children were pretty fundamental. . . .

The R. N. O. was speaking, apparently addressing the interior of his cap, which he held level with his breast.

"The point is just that, you see. She's an innocent instrument. Port Said, Zagazig, Ismailia, are all full of innocent instruments. That doesn't make it any easier for us. And civilians are under French supervision, not ours. If your people," he raised his eyes slightly for a second toward Admiral Pommelet, "if your people can't see their way to check this business, for political reasons, the best thing to do would be to ask for instructions, jointly."

He walked toward the door. No, he told Stephan, they had a carriage waiting. Better get the lady a cab and turn in himself. Turn out the light.

Not a word, Stephan noted as he shut the outer door and saw the form of Madame Ernestine silhouetted against the Canal—not a word about the *Goeben* or the *Ben-ma-chree* to the Frenchman! Stephan suddenly felt cold round his heart as he thought of the load the chief was carrying. If it came he had only that old bearded Frog to confer with. Where was Patsy Coombes? Why did Sir Patrick Coombes, Rear Admiral of the Fleet, D. S. O., K. C. M. G., K. P., K. C. S. I., R. D., Officer of the Legion of Honour and Commander of the Order of the Redeemer, Junior Lord of the Admiralty in the late government, leave a vital spot like Port Said wide open to a ship like the *Goeben?* Patsy Coombes, the dapper monocled little terror whose profanity and wealth gave admiralty clerks cold sweating fits! Why wasn't he here with his eighteen-thousand-ton *Rapacious*, the flagship of the squadron? They said Patsy was in Malta refitting. They said Patsy had about a million defective condenser

tubes. They said he was at the bottom of the sea, sunk by an Austrian submarine. They said he was in Bizerta with his fore compartments holed by hitting a mine. They said everything and knew nothing, those guzzling gossips of the Eastern Exchange Hotel Bar. Only the R. N. O. knew where Patsy was. As for the *Ben-ma-chree*, the French, so Stephan had heard from Swaffham, were supposed to supply two destroyers to convoy her as far as the western end of Cyprus. While they coaled in Limassol she went on by herself at twenty-seven knots.

That was what made the cold pressure round his heart as he turned and saw the sweetly graceful form of this Syrian houri outlined against the Canal. Just where Anastasia often gazed at the moon while waiting for Ethel. It was now two o'clock in the morning. He heard the jingle of the harness as the R. N. O. and Admiral Pommelet drove away. Pommelet! That was French for little apple, wasn't it? Stephan sniggered to himself and pulled up. That was rot! The R. N. O.'s name was Gamble; his own was, perhaps, funny to a Frog.

Courtesy only made him guide the girl's arm, warm, firm, thrilling and appealing, as they descended. She stumbled and he held her. The perfume of her clothes enfolded him. He heard her voice, the voice which Anastasia was using once more to assail the ramparts of his soul.

"Mister Lieutenant, you can 'ave what you like . . . You see they make mistake. I don't do that business, Mister Lieutenant. Stein's Oriental Store, he is nothing to me. I go to the Police, I am 'onest *couturière*. You ask Mister George."

He thought: "And get into her infernal George's power for the duration of the war!" Aloud, he said he

didn't doubt it. What she had to do was to keep her mouth shut about officers' wives. Did she understand?

"Mister Lieutenant, you make mistake!"

"Do I?" He clenched her arm savagely and shook her in the dense darkness of the courtyard behind the Custom House. "*You* make mistake, as you call it. You think you can get me going, don't you? Men aren't all alike, you know! I don't believe you, you see. Now I—we—live in the same house as you now. I'll show you! I'll take you back there. And you can tell Mrs. Rumford your cock-and-bull yarn. Understand?"

He held her so that her ear was close to his lips. They were by the gate as the cab he had sent away rolled with a faint clink and grunt along the street. He saw her smile in the subdued light of the candle in the carriage lamp. He felt his breath come and go too fast, too fast! Across the street, in her great cool room with the electric fan, Anastasia was sleeping with that same smile on her lips. He sank back in the carriage and took off his cap. He suddenly faced the problem that lay in front of him. It was not only the question of children—he wasn't so mad about them as that—but support in this hour. Ethel took the war so coolly! She had such a superior tone about it. "Of course" the men did their bit. "Of course" Stephan and Swaff and the rest of them were "working awfully hard." Everything was "of course." She was absolutely correct in her attitude. She regarded the R. N. O. as—yes, sometimes too much—as the fount of all official wisdom. And yet, with all this, she made him feel that her mind was on something far out, beyond this blood and sweat, beyond the Pillars of Hercules, even beyond his own imagining! He wanted—oh, so much!—to tell her all his troubles. He would even

have told her about Anastasia and this—this poor substitute here. Why not? Absolute frankness between man and wife was his ideal. They two against the world! We all had weaknesses: the fatal weakness was to conceal them from the one who trusts us, who has linked her life . . .

"Mister Lieutenant, you make trouble for me?"

The vibrant glamorous voice was in his ears, like a siren song in perilous seas by faery lands forlorn. How powerful was the desire to sink into ivory arms, to press one's head against soft swelling breasts! Through the hot dark streets they rolled to the soft rumble of wheels in dust and clink of harness, to the Place Abbas.

"No!" he said, passing his tongue over dry lips. "No! Why should I? I'm not afraid of anything you can do. . . ."

He heard her whispering again and sat silent, marvelling at himself. At her, too, for her sure knowledge of the human heart and the craft with which she used the opportunity chance had flung to her. Pure chance, that he should have found her at the bey's office, that the chief, to avoid talk, had come over from Navy House. Pure chance that he himself had found a flat, a funkhole, in the Place Abbas. He raised his wrist to look at the radiolite dial. Two o'clock in the morning. He felt his hand seized with the soft firm clasp of experience.

"I will show you!" she said sweetly. "I will show you 'ow Syrian woman love. You come . . . eh?"

Did she really, he pondered, think he was that sort? Well, he would show *her!* He met her eyes and studied the shadowy conundrum. Had she any idea how much he wanted to . . . But he couldn't confuse her any longer with Anastasia. She was doing Anastasia's work, but

now she had a personality of her own. She was three-dimensional, vibrating with her secret purposes. She was going to show him how a Syrian woman loved. She had divined within him that thin sharp desire. That was what MacTaggart meant, he supposed, when he said a man's weakness was woman's only strength. He was a cryptic blighter, MacTaggart. How did he find out all these things? There was only one answer to that. Angus MacTaggart, late of the Royal Scots, who had said that nothing would ever make *him* a soldier, civilian assistant censor on account of his knowledge of three oriental languages and good Platonic Greek, had drawn or experiences other than those obtained in Oxford colleges. Men of the world, apparently, had some sort of masonic degrees to get as well as university degrees. He, Stephan, was only a beginner. You didn't learn much at sea, after all.

He stopped thinking suddenly, as an engineer throws out the clutch and leaves the motor sentient but idle. The white front of the house was visible through the trees. Not a sound. He got out over the long silken limbs. He felt his hand seized and against it the smooth rondure of her face. Leaning down, so that his dark face and dirty fez were illuminated by the candle, the driver held out his hand and let his gleaming eye rest on Stephan's for a second. Paid, he straightened up and the pair of figures moved in the shadow of the hood to the doorway before he had gathered speed.

On the flags of the passage the native watchman lay by a door, a vague bundle that moved and was still again as Ernestine breathed a warning. The lift was not working. Into the void of the stairway she drew Stephan, who sensed the superficial sweetness of such an adventure. He

thought how Anastasia would draw him thus, to a chamber of odorous shadows magical with her voice in the opalescent transparencies of a seraglio, beneath bronze candelabra. So he saw the ruin of his soul by fleshly pleasures as he followed the firmly clasped fingers of the Syrian woman who was about to reveal how she loved. That was a strange phrase for her to use. Why did he follow her so easily, so fearless of this proximity to Ethel? They were passing his own door, and yet he made no attempt to break away from her. And then, after one soft click of the patent lock, they were inside.

Stephan lay back in a bent wood rocker while she vanished through a salmon-coloured portière. The furniture was bent wood and burnt bamboo, a golden oak gramophone, and pictures of Cologne Cathedral with mother-of-pearl windows. On the table by his side was a mug: "A present from Clacton-on-Sea." The electric light was shaded by a glass, green-tasselled horror on which bunches of grapes bulged like bladders of ink. An enlargement two feet high and eighteen inches wide, in a gilt frame, hung over the chaise-longue. It was the photograph of a fattish child, whose eyes, in the enlargement, resembled the grapes on the lamp shade. On another wall were photographs framed in shells, of men with heavy black hair and moustaches, and women in tight hour-glass bodices. There was a piece of yellow wood on which was a coloured picture of Jerusalem.

She stood suddenly before him without her veil or silk cloak, her hands on her hips. She had lighted a cigarette. She drew on it and took it in her fingers, expelling straight jets through her nostrils, looking at Stephan.

"Look!" she said softly. "This is my 'ouse. But in Homs I 'ave a baby," and she pointed. "My little Dimi-

tri!" she muttered as she turned to the enlargement. "For you I work so 'ard. For you I save money." She stood with one hand pointing, the other holding the cigarette, looking over her shoulder at Stephan.

"See, my family," she said, and waved toward the photographs. " 'Ere you 'ave my life!" She thrust into his hands a cedar-framed painting of a town of flat roofs, with minarets and domes amid cypresses. "My town, Mister Lieutenant. My old fazzer and mozzer, my brozzer and sizter, my aunts, uncles, cozzin, live 'ere. *Now* you understand?"

She leaned toward him with a hard bright light in her dark eyes as he laid the gaudy thing down. He saw the *Ben-ma-chree* rushing, at twenty-eight knots, through the darkness; the planes dropping one by one from the derricks; the dawn creeping over the desert from Bagdad; Swaff ahead of his squadron, looking down on the gray-white smudge that was Homs. He heard the woman's voice whispering in his ear and marvelled how he had ever imagined that she might be enamoured of his soul.

"My friend, when I show 'im that paper, he say the truth!" she breathed. "What do I know? My baby, my Dimitri, is in Homs, with my people. My 'usban', he is in Turkish Army. The Turkish soldiers, they take 'im. 'E is Turkish subject. What can 'e do? Now 'e is at Erzeroum, far far away from Homs, in the mountains of the north. I 'ave nobody. I 'ave to work. I do what I can, to get money for my Dimitri and then my frien', when I show 'im paper, 'e tell me the truth. *Christi!* You understand?" Her voice rose to a sharp whistle. Her body trembled and the lamp shook as she leaned on the bamboo table.

He thought: Why is she telling me this? There's something here! He was almost aware of a physical presence bending down over the houses, peering darkly in at the windows, a huge shadow. She was telling him, in a veiled passion, that the news had escaped her, that the spies with which Port Said was honeycombed had got hold of it. He stared at her polished nails clawing the plush cover of the bamboo table. She was scared of that as well as of her kid in Homs. Suppose they had put two and two together and found five? No wonder the chief was under a strain. There was the *Goeben*, as fast or faster than the *Ben-ma-chree*. With thirteen-inch guns, by God!

"You and your friend won't stand much of a chance if anything happens now," he said. "You'll never get to Homs again, I promise you."

"No?" she said. She dashed the cigarette into a bowl of green and orange glaze. "Me, I laugh at you all! If my baby is kill' what do I care what you do, eh? You wait! Perhaps I spick. I spick—what I know of you peoples 'ere. Your lieutenant frien'."

"Stop that!" he said peremptorily. "You're getting excited, talking so loud. You speak, you say? What? That he comes here? I know that already. I've seen him coming here. You don't expect me to thank you for that, do you?"

"I no ask him to come 'ere. 'E come for the smoke. 'E's very good feller." She gave a short laugh.

"So that's it, is it? And that's why he's always in Merola's place. It's all fitting together. Well, we've got that Farag. We'll stop the whole damn business before long. Now I'm going. I'll see Yakoub at the office in the morning, find out what he says. And let me ad-

vise you not to say things about my wife, understand?"

"Mister Lieutenant, I spick truth all the time. You no believe me? All ri'. By an' bye you fin' I spick truth."

"By and bye!" he echoed. "By and bye!——"

Stephan's mouth remained open. He saw the woman silhouetted suddenly against a blue-white glare from the window, like a distant oxyacetylene flame, and the building shook. There was a heavy thump. She was visible for a moment, her arms raised and her shoulders curved, as though staring at him across a chasm. A second and third explosion followed flashes, like sheet lightning, beyond dark barricades. And then the light on the table went out suddenly.

His hand on the door, Stephan swung it and was outside as the next explosion struck his ear with a tremendous volume of reverberating sound. It was like a crackle of thunder beyond a mountain. He thought: She's here! She's shelling the Canal! Hit, hit, hit! Right on her target, by God!

In the darkness he heard the girl scream and fall, and then nothing. It was as though the explosions had annihilated the world, leaving him groping in the void. He put out his hands to find the wall and his own door. Ethel! She was in there, waiting. He felt in his pocket for a match box. He thought: Silver match box—wedding present—wax vestas always damp in this climate—stick to one's fingers—leave blue singe on finger. His hand touched the iron grille of the elevator. He must have walked a step. His own door was opposite. It was that woman who had screamed, not Ethel, he told himself. He didn't think Ethel would *scream.* What would she do? He tried to strike a match. The explosion had burst a fuse or destroyed the wires over there. There would

be fires. Was Navy House hit? The match fizzed and went red. And then everything went red. A whining roar from afar and a detonation close by, all around him, driving in on him. He seemed to be gazing for an instant into a niagara of blood covered with golden spangles. The house quivered and heavy crashes sounded below as slabs of plaster fell. A voice moaned down there, "Allah-illilla-ah!" And then again the drone far away.

Stephan struck the door open. There was a sharp burning acrid fume coming up the stairway. He saw the pink-domed nightlight burning on the side table of the bedroom. And Ethel lay on the bed, her head down—black plaits hiding her face, in her hand the telephone dragged from the table.

She had fainted.

IV

STEPHEN looked up as a shadow fell across his desk.

"You?" He reached out and grasped the hand of a thin sandy-haired man whose shoulder blades were sharply prominent beneath the thin gray alpaca coat. MacTaggart. He had his usual bulky satchel and his usual air of gentle melancholy. Rather boring fellow at times. But his pale eyes were clever, and he was never led astray by false trails. Stephan drew him forward and motioned him into the drawing room.

"I'll be there in a minute," he said, and called the boy to bring a drink. "The sun's over the foreyard," he added, sitting to his work again.

It was. The planks and rails of the veranda were hot to the hand. The man who had said, without bitterness, that nothing would ever make a soldier of him, but who could converse with a Salonika cabby in Platonic Greek, or with a Port Said boatman in local Arabic, set his satchel on the bamboo table and waved away the gin-and-vermouth Stephan's servant held out to him on a brass tray. He sat down with a faint rustle into a wicker chair and rested his long chin on his interlaced fingers.

Stephan came in briskly, glanced at the civilian censor, and passed on into the bedroom to get his tobacco pouch. He did not believe in smoking in the office. He looked at himself in the glass over the array of Ethel's things, solid silver, a wedding present from his father. He had shaved after a two-hour sleep. He felt fresh and charged with vitality. Ethel was in the hospital. The

air raid had killed six people and demolished a lot of houses. Now, in the bright hot sunlight, it seemed incredible. Everything was going on, on the surface, as before. Ethel was reported suffering from slight shock. The R. N. O. had phoned to the effect that if she wished she could go to Alexandria for a week. Stephan said they would decide later.

He scanned himself in the glass narrowly. An air raid! He had thought it was the *Goeben* shelling the town from the sea! A wireless from El Arish had set the gunners alert, and while it had been almost impossible to see the planes in the cloud-flecked dawn, they had kept too high to do any organized destruction. A bomb on the Quai, just missing the unused Pharos, two on the arsenal dock, killing some soldiers in a tent, and others in the basin among the ships. One had hit an ammunition vessel whose hatches, covered four feet deep with sandbags, did not fail. Stephan, at breakfast when he returned from the hospital, heard an archy officer say the Turkish bombs were home-made; varnish cans filled with nitro-cellulose and shrapnel; fuses made out of blacking tins and copper wire. The archy chap had remarked that the *Ben-ma-chree* would do more than that to Thingumbyjig or whatever the place was, according to his friend the armament officer at the air base. Had Stephan seen those new "peardrops" the R. N. A. S. were carrying? Fifty-pound dollops of T. N. T. The releasing triggers were operated by the timing gear on the telescope in the camera pit. The observer had his pictures memorized and so, you see . . .? Naturally elated, that archy boy was, having driven the planes away almost at once. The conversation had made Stephan feel that somebody had been on the job. It had

kept his mind from his own private affairs. Because, returning to the flat in the Place Abbas after breakfast, picking his way among the fallen cornices and plaster, the broken flower pots and fragments of cast-iron work in the entrance, he had met Mr. George Yakoub descending the stairs.

There was a sample, he reflected, of the way a native could evade an issue. Stephan was as certain as he was of anything in this world that Mister Yakoub had been confabulating with Madame Ernestine (Modes). And yet, when he met him with a "Well, what are *you* up to?", the slick youth had immediately explained, "Sir, I came to see you, to inquire. They tell me at the Custom House the Place Abbas is destroye'." And when Stephan, taking him by the elbow and propelling him into the very midst of the Place, taxed him with blabbing a lot of damnable lies to that woman up there, Mr. Yakoub had never flickered an eyelash while he denied doing anything of the sort. On the contrary he had demanded an apology. "Sir, I make full report my conduct to R. N. O. This very important crise' in my career. Sir, I ask you retrac' your statements. I 'ave already apply for commission R. N. V. R. sub-lieutenant, as permitte' in Navy Order P. Seventeen O Six, just issue' at Neevy Hahse." Stephan had admired that little piece of Dago elocution, but it hadn't modified his reply. Mister Yakoub was to move his typewriter desk to the other side of the office and he was to sever his acquaintance with ladies like Madame Ernestine who entertained officers in her flat. To this Mister Yakoub returned a somewhat uncertain but defiant stare asking if he, Lieutenant Rumford, wanted any further information about officers

in ladies' flats. If he did he could get it from Lieutenant Rigby in the office. He would be surprise' . . .

Instead of doing anything so insane, he had sent Rigby out to two new neutral ships arriving from Suez and had settled to his own work. It had suddenly struck him that it would be easier if he had Rigby in the office all the time and left Ethel out of it. There indeed was the whole trouble, he saw. But he couldn't do anything about it now. She had the commission. She would be utterly unable to understand what he meant if he suggested it. All the same, he had never before comprehended how her presence in the office placed him at a disadvantage in the fundamental intimacies.

He had gone to work. MacTaggart had sent a note saying he was coming, and here he was. Captain Bannister had looked in, very grave. Was he expected to go to Buenos Aires and back short of two officers? A telegram from the *Alceste* to say she was nearly loaded and would be in Port Said the following day, late. Funeral of the six men killed, which meant he would have to get out his sword. Memorandum from R. N. O. requesting attendance at Navy House, with engineer-captain, R. T. O., three commanders and a lieutenant-colonel attached to R. N. A. S. at one-thirty.

He found his pouch and briar and carried them into the drawing room. MacTaggart sat in deep thought, his long bony wrists and prominent forehead catching the light that slotted through the closed jalousies. Stephan wondered again at MacTaggart's allusions to the Coptic maidens and his apparent familiarity with poetical amorousness. He didn't look as if he would know what to say to a V. A. D. or a Wren, as they called the navy girls. He would stand like a sandy-haired graven image

in front of Anastasia Callisthenes. Suddenly Stephan remembered that MacTaggart read Anastasia's letters, as he read all aliens' letters, to her colonel in London and her father in Athens. He didn't like her anyway. But how about the Coptic maidens? Figure of speech probably.

Stephen said, "What luck? Come out here, it's cooler." He dragged two wicker chairs through the doorway leading to the gallery over the street, which was in shadow at the eastern end, and clapped his hands for the boy. They could see the balcony of Anastasia's room in the Marina. She had the corner room on the second floor. Across the hot blast of sunlight dividing his balcony from hers he could see into her darkened chamber. MacTaggart spoke with the immense deliberation of the cultured Scot. He spoke nevertheless with a sort of clamped-down anger, a controlled ferocity. He was in one of those moods of disgust which flared up and blistered the minds and hearts of men when they encountered the enthroned stupidity of proconsuls and the high command. Ever since he had left Cairo he had been bottled up, unable to confide in a soul. Which was one of the torments of a censor's life. As a rule the pawky secretive MacTaggart relished the obligations of reticence. He could contemplate the spectacle of men disporting themselves in the cabarets with courtesans after writing manly affectionate letters to girls in Shields, Swansea, and Dundee. No one would have guessed that MacTaggart, in the course of duty, read those letters. Such disparity between conduct and sentiment he understood as a psychologist. But Cairo had induced in him a profound depression. The sight of those men, hundreds of them, thronging hotels

and streets, in their gleaming harness, with their great squatting buttocks and crimson necks, their huge khaki-coloured cars and flashy launches, in which smart women rode continually, evoked in MacTaggart a violent animosity.

"Nothing can be done there," he said, nursing a bony knee. "Nothing."

"I know," said Stephan, throwing the burnt match into the street. "It's a mess."

"An Augean stable," said MacTaggart drily.

"A what? Oh . . . yes." Stephan listened to the fable. He had no classical equipment at all; but he caught the idea as it came off MacTaggart's tongue. To leave the stalls of three thousand cattle uncleansed for thirty years, he said, was exactly what he would expect of a Greek! He asked who would be the Hercules this time. Allenby, eh? Was he really coming from France?

"I wish," said MacTaggart, "he had been present at my interview with Sir Spencer. I had to cheek a lieutenant-colonel. I wish every bureaucrat in the land of Egypt could be drowned in the Red Sea. They are taking off our own chariot wheels."

Stephan listened in silence. Across the street he could see something moving in the shuttered darkness of Anastasia's chamber. Taking off our chariot wheels, eh? That was one of old Mac's high-brow expressions. Out of the Old Testament, probably. But wasn't everybody trying to take off someone's chariot wheels? Getting in each other's road? We had no coördination except in the navy, he thought. With the result that civilian censors got so worked up they sauced staff-officers. And Syrian clerks sauced lieutenants, he added.

"All day I waited," murmured MacTaggart.

"Waited in the ante-chambers of the great, as they used to say in the old days. A bit of lunch at Shepheard's, wedged in between generals in red tabs and generals in blue tabs. . . . You know those Central American armies, where every man is a colonel? I thought of them as I lunched. We had fish, full of bones. No Cleopatra's brine-soaked tunny for us. Then back to his imperial majesty's office. Brass hats coming and going. I wouldn't have seen him at all if I hadn't run into a man I used to know. He's in the East Welch—the regiment that wears a patch like a piece of an old sock on the tunic between the shoulder blades. They won it at Ramillies, or perhaps Quatre Bras; I forget. He's on the staff, this chap. He took me into the staff lieutenant-colonel's office. Intelligence. As I am a civilian official he gave me a sour look. Very sour look! You remember—no, you don't—David Copperfield's stepfather's sister had the same sort of look when she scowled at him after staring at the pickled walnuts. What was her name? That murdering sister of a woman, Betsy Trotwood called her. A soldier can never believe a civilian isn't either a fool, or a rogue, or both. Ah, Miss Murdstone was the name. Yes, he wasn't glad to see me at all. He said, 'Sir Spencer is an extremely busy man. Perhaps you don't realize that.' I said I realized it to the fullest degree, but that I had evidence to put before him of a complete system of enemy espionage and communication going on from one end of the country to the other. He fixed his eyeglass at me and said, 'Really? Suppose you let me go over this evidence with you.' I said I had no intention of troubling him. My business was with Sir Spencer. 'We get so many people here who want to take up Sir Spencer's time with unimportant details.' He was an insolent

swine, that lieutenant-colonel. I asked him if he was alluding to my business. I asked him if the direct transmission of enemy instructions to their East African Army through our territory was unimportant. I asked him if payment, in American currency, to Egyptian merchants for goods sent south in neutral ships and sold to the Arab ship chandlers of Dar-es-Salaam, was unimportant. And because he stared at me as if I were some tramp they had let in I asked him if letters containing twenty pounds' worth of French and Italian postage stamps, consigned to local shopkeepers who were now in prison for selling hashish to enlisted men, were to be classed as unimportant. I slapped one of them down on his desk and said if Sir Spencer was not to be seen I was going home to lay it before the ministers. By the next boat."

"Ha!" said Stephan. "Good for you." He made a gesture as though waving a flag. Across the street a pale shadow in the dusk of Anastasia's chamber made a joyous signal in reply. Stephan laid his head back against the shutter and watched her for a second before he looked at MacTaggart.

"He got up, looking at me and breathing through his nose."

"I know that chap," said Stephan, glancing across the street again. "His name's Segby. He's foul. His old man is Segby's Baking Powder. I've got to go back to the office. What did the great Sir Spencer say?"

He rose and stood looking down at MacTaggart. He experienced a strange tingling sensation at the back of his head. Anastasia, he knew, was watching him from the room shuttered against the sunlight. She was perfectly still, waiting for him to make another gesture.

MacTaggart said: "He was at a great desk, his head leaning on his hand. A secretary stood with some big blue papers. The telephone on the desk was ringing. Another telephone, in an alcove, was being answered by another secretary. A private door on the other side of the room was opening a little and closing as though someone in there was in a funk. He gave me the impression, as I came up, of a man condemned."

"To what?" said Stephan, moving again. Should he look across? He thought: She is going to lose no time while Ethel is over the water.

"To a sort of bureaucratic hell," said MacTaggart. "Surrounded by secretarial devils. He was in torment. He looked at me as a man dying in a hospital might look at a process server with a writ. Then for a moment I thought he had actually fainted before my eyes, he sat so still, his head on his hand, his elbows deep in papers. I began to tell him what I had discovered. I offered him a precis of the evidence. He sat without moving, as though he were one of those animals that feign death through an absolute immobility. As if he thought that by pretending to be dead we would all go away!"

"No!" said Stephan, with amusement in his voice. He hated Sir Spencer because the navy hated all political appointees. He could *see* Sir Spencer . . .

"Just like that," said MacTaggart. "He waited, and then opened his eyes at me as though he couldn't believe I was still there. I said I hoped he would go into the matter. I had no power to stop mails proceeding in some way through Cairo to Suez, as was proved by the letters I had to show him. He waved his hand to me to go away. He said it very faintly, 'Go away.' And

the secretary with the blue papers, who was answering the phone, offered him the receiver. I said I'd come to Cairo for this specific purpose. He said in a faint voice, 'Don't bother me. No time.' "

"Well!" Stephen glanced up and reached the door. A long white arm flickered from the mirror-haunted obscurity of the hotel chamber. MacTaggart said:

"When you are at liberty, I want you to get Bek'ahri Bey."

Stephan dived into the drawing room and laid his pipe on a copper tray. He saw one of Bek'ahri Bey's policemen standing, incredibly tall in his close-fitting white uniform and high tarboosh, a letter in his sun-scorched hairy hand. He was looking at Mister Yakoub and speaking rapidly in Arabic. Mister Yakoub was fitting a fresh sheet of paper into his typewriter. He had moved his table to the other side of the office. Stephan was conscious of the fact that Mister Yakoub could now witness everything that went on in the drawing room by merely raising his eyes.

Stephan entered the office. Arab runners were backed in a row against the balustrade outside, holding permits for signature. They were more afraid of that Sudanese bobby than of the navy. Now MacTaggart had something in view. Stephan found himself unable to understand his fellow men. Why had he, of all the officers in the land of Egypt, this burden of temptation? How could he, within an hour or two of taking his wife over to the hospital, wait, *wait* while Anastasia made him a signal? He couldn't explain that away to himself. Some reaction from the explosion from the taut waiting for the next one, which might land on the roof of the Maison de Lesseps (or on the Marina for that matter),

had brought to him a feeling of elation, an accession of adventurous strength. It was, he supposed, what lay behind the gusty sexuality of the men on the trench-line fronts. When a man had had a rendezvous with death he was quite likely to have a rendezvous with life, if he could get a chance. Yes; but sin was sin. All the wars in the world weren't going to change that. Thou shalt not . . . And what he had been taught harped on the sin even in thought. "Whoso looketh . . . to lust after . . ."

He took the letter the policeman held out to him and sat down heavily behind his desk.

The note said that it had been decided to release the three men held on charges of importing hashish for lack of evidence. Bek'ahri Bey would be in his office in the Douane in half an hour and wished to have the honour of a conference with Lieutenant Rumford and Mr. MacTaggart. Very important and strictly confidential.

Stephan nodded and the policeman saluted. More discoveries! Bek'ahri Bey, digging down in the subsoil of Port Said's highly organized debaucheries, had found —what? Probably, thought Stephan, another officer. *Lack of evidence!*

Whatever it might be, Stephan thought, it wasn't that. He looked at his watch. It wouldn't do to be late at Navy House. Better cut lunch if necessary. While over there he would have to get a word with the chief's secretary and find out about Master Yakoub's commission. They would want to know something about Master Yakoub, of course, and they would apply to Master Yakoub's superior officer. Stephan frowned. To

be just, to be just! How simple it was in theory! How difficult in reality!

As he called the Arabs in one by one and scrutinized their lists, he let his mind dwell lovingly upon the picture, evoked by MacTaggart, of Sir Spencer in his own special hell. What forces were straining the fabric of Egypt! King Fuad was living in the palace of Ras-el-Tin, nervous as a cat, in the rooms where his cousin, the Khedive, had plotted with Enver Bey's men. Out at rail-head in the desert, men in khaki shorts thrust forward the track to Gaza and Askalon, and made sudden fatal rushes at the tribesmen whose sheiks had sworn to fight the Osmanli, but who fought Turk and Briton as they came. Egypt, the land of Egypt, was like the keystone of an arch that spanned the world from Gibraltar to Singapore. Yet look at that mob of brass hats in Cairo, brass hats and Sir Spencer's crowd of secretaries! They were the plagues of Egypt, Stephan thought. Even Moses couldn't have done much with that lot. The keystone was being bored and tunnelled by enemy agents. MacTaggart, sitting out there, looking with unseeing eyes straight at Anastasia's bedroom, had enough evidence to set England roaring if you could get a soul to believe it! Or an editor who would risk being shot at sunrise to print it. Taking off the chariot wheels wasn't an adequate description of what was going on. Released for lack of evidence!

He finished signing chits and went back to MacTaggart, who had risen, and who now stood within the doorway, looking down at two Englishmen and an Arab in front of the Marina. Stephan recognized Farag. He saw the dark features of that native become brilliant with a smile as his glance ran over the Custom House

building. It was as though Farag sensed the presence of men watching him and was amused. The two men with him settled their collars and tilted their straw hats slightly as they started across the street to the gate.

"They're off the *Cardiganshire*," said Stephan. "Those two. That's Farag, who has worked for Ranciulli since I've been here in Port Said. They've just been discharged for lack of evidence."

"Evidence of what?" asked MacTaggart.

"Hashish. They were caught with the stuff on them, mind you, and now they're out for lack of evidence. So Bek'ahri Bey says."

"We'd better go down and see him."

"He wants us to. Wait, I must phone the hospital."

Stephan watched George Yakoub as he waited for the call to go through. George Yakoub was looking dishevelled, somehow, in spite of his carefully planished black hair and starched collar. His toes were turned in under his chair. Something was worrying Mister Yakoub, thought Stephan.

"Yes," he said to the receiver. It was a nurse speaking. Mrs. Rumford was resting comfortably. The doctor thought she really ought to go to Alexandria for a week. Yes, right away. Yes, she would get Mrs. Rumford to ring at three o'clock if possible.

He followed MacTaggart down the stairway and experienced a sensation of unfamiliar spiritual danger. Physically it began in his loins and ran up the spine. His scalp tingled. Ethel in Alexandria for a week. He could not go himself now. And it was the doctor's suggestion, the R. N. O.'s suggestion. Was it danger only —or rather, was danger the thing he had always thought it? He almost asked the question aloud of Mac-

Taggart as they walked toward the door of Bek'ahri Bey's office in the Custom House. But you couldn't say to a man, "My soul is in danger, and I enjoy the feeling it gives me, of intenser vitality, of adventure such as I have never had before. Why is this?" MacTaggart and his Coptic maidens could not explain this strange thrill. It was not that he, Stephan, had any interest at all in maidens, Coptic or otherwise. He didn't care for women in that sense at all, and he knew it. He didn't even care for their society, come to that. It was his own consciousness of this which made him marvel at the strange new sensation that went all through him. That Ernestine hadn't made him feel weak or in danger. Only because she seemed to be the embodiment of Anastasia had she appeared of any significance. And when he tried to formulate what Anastasia might mean to him, he could only stammer in his mind, "She . . . she . . . she . . ." and feel that strange thrill again.

In the policeman's private room they sat in silence as an orderly served black coffee on a brass tray. Bek'ahri Bey's black eyes were fixed upon MacTaggart's pale features. The bond between these men was purely professional. Their fundamental convictions never came into view save as a passion for official achievement. Stephan, staring at Bek'ahri Bey, tried to see, behind the tall self-possessed bureaucrat, a man with a wife and six children in Helouan. Stephan had seen the wife, a broad-beamed lady in flowing black, whose black eyes gleamed over the black *yashmak* and on whose broad olive forehead rested a round thing like a gilded bobbin. An Egyptian matron. But she was only part of a fantastic background for the living figures of his brain,

for men like MacTaggart and Bannister and for women like Ethel and . . .

Bek'ahri Bey was speaking.

". . . received this morning by telegraph. I have had it decoded by Mr. MacTaggart's assistant. I will read it to you:

"The woman in Stein's Oriental Stores is an Italian who calls herself Elizabetta Italiana of Venice. This of course is the usual professional nom d'amour *adopted by women of her class. The investigation now shows that she was married before the war to a George Yakoub, a Syrian clerk, at that time employed by the Roumanian Mail Steamship Line in the Rue Sesostris. He was afterward employed by the superintendent of marine in the office on the Bassin de Carenage. This woman was discovered by him in an affair with a Genoese captain and since that time he has had no communication with her. He appears to have left the city and is supposed to be honourably employed in Port Said. The woman, at the instigation of the Genoese, secured a position in Stein's Oriental Stores. He would then bring to her counter packages of letters which she enclosed in parcels consigned to Madame Ernestine of Port Said, tying said parcels in such a way that a confederate in the sorting office in Cairo, now under arrest, was able to identify and open them to remove the packages and reconsign them to Suez. The Genoese was captain of a Greek steamer and the packages come from Volo and sometimes Salonika. In this way the strict surveillance of mails entering Alexandria was evaded and regular communication maintained with East African points and Indian nationals."*

Bek'ahri Bey laid the paper on the table and drank his coffee. He then added, looking down at the paper, and with a sharp sudden lift of his head, at his two companions, "Respectfully submitted."

MacTaggart waved his hand vaguely over the table, his chin sunk forward on his chest.

"What is the good of all this, if you can't arrest anybody?" he asked in a low tone.

"Or even if you do arrest them, let them go again, for lack of evidence?" said Stephan in a discontented whisper.

"You mean those three suspects?"

"Suspects! I mean that swine Farag. I tell you, he's a link. He goes and comes as he likes in Ranciulli's employ, he goes on every ship in the harbour, he hobnobs with drunken sergeants and crooked stewards, and I catch him red-handed trying to get glycerine off on a forged signature—and he's out, on lack of evidence. What's the use of us trying to stop these damned Arabs if you won't lock 'em up? Lack of evidence!"

"Now wait, Lieutenant. What you say is perfectly true as far as it goes. But we haven't found the connection in Port Said."

"Farag's the connection. Lock him up and you break the chain," said Stephan.

"You mean," said MacTaggart to Bek'ahri Bey, "that Farag can make trouble for us?"

Bek'ahri Bey drew another paper from his desk.

"Precisely. Last night, by instructions, my men questioned Farag in his cell. He said he would speak only to me. I had him brought in and he at once made circumstantial charges against a commander of the navy in this port. I told him he would not get a chance to make any charges because he was a spy and was to be treated as a spy. He then said that if anything happened to him he had a friend who would make the charges. I

sent him back. The friend is an accomplice, of course. Now——"

"But you've just let him out," said Stephan.

Bek'ahri Bey eased his neck in his collar and took a deep breath.

"Sometimes letting a man go will bring in two," he remarked. "Or a woman."

"You had hold of a woman last night," said Stephan. "I'll bet a ten-pound note to a tanner that woman knows more than we have got out of her."

Bek'ahri Bey's big black eyes rose slowly to fix themselves on Stephan's face, but he made no reply.

"If he held her he would have to hold Yakoub too," said MacTaggart. "Don't you think?" He and the policeman looked at each other.

Stephan pushed his lips out against his pencil.

"I hope you don't imagine I care what you do to Yakoub. He's getting too big for his boots, anyhow. He has put in for a commission, Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve if you please! I believe he can, too, by the latest regulations."

He thought: You give these natives an inch and they put in for a mile at once.

"I am trying to find out something," said the policeman. "For instance, the notebook Lieutenant Commander Swaffham lost. He lost it several days ago."

"He did! Then this Ernestine must have had it all the while." Stephan sat up suddenly.

"Yes, well? It may have been dropped where she found it, to get her into trouble."

"Well, if you believe that you'll believe anything," said Stephan. MacTaggart, sunk in thought, gazed through the screens.

"Mr. Swaffham's orderly reports that Mr. Swaffham asked him four days ago if he had seen that notebook. The orderly remembers the words Mr. Swaffham used. The conversation took place while Mr. Swaffham was changing. The orderly was putting buttons into a fresh uniform."

Bek'ahri Bey read the words from his notes on the desk. He looked up.

"If the woman is arrested, what do we get? We don't find out what she did with the information. All we know is that while the *Ben-ma-chree* was out, there was an air raid. And besides, we have not yet heard from the *Ben-ma-chree*."

Bek'ahri Bey stood up and avoided the gaze of his companions. Stephan held up his hand.

"What commander did Farag——"

"Mr. Rumford, you ought not to ask me that question," said Bek'ahri Bey.

"Well . . ." Stephen gnawed a thumb. "What did he say about this commander?"

"Farag is on the most intimate terms with him."

"God damn it, what's this?" Stephan shouted, and stood up, dishevelled. "A filthy Arab runner on the most intimate—— Here, I want to know the name. I'm going to the R. N. O. about this. Write it down, please. MacTaggart, you take that piece of paper and read it, and pass it to me. That's it. . . ." He sat down again.

He looked at the name and put the paper in his pocket. They sat silent for a moment. He thought: I'm a bluff. I can't go to Gamble with this. This beats cock-fighting. . . .

He had a sudden resurgence of his passionate desire

to be put on a ship, to fight a visible enemy. Even as he gave way to it he knew it was folly. They wouldn't put him on a ship. His work was here. And as suddenly he felt purged of that desire. Because other men were foolish or base, was he to quit? It would take all their craft to beat this enemy, who fought with women and Arab spies, who corrupted officers and men within the citadel. Bek'ahri Bey was right, after all. When the trail ran into Navy House you couldn't expect him to follow it up as he would in Arabtown.

Stephan got up and went to the window where he could see the Gyppy custom house clerks in their little enclosure, down on their mats, saying their prayers. He knew that the commander whose name the policeman had written down ought to have been sent home. He had been in action hundreds of times with submarines and mines. He had helped to close the Adriatic. That sea was now stitched up as neatly as a shroud. It was a shroud for Austrian ships. Italy was squawking over that. Well, the commander should have been sent home. Oh no! They leave him here and he gets the dope habit, like so many others in the same case, and he becomes "on the most intimate terms" with Farag. No wonder that damned native would grin in an officer's face when he came with his chits! On intimate terms with a commander R. N., D. S. O., D. C. M., R. D. and the Order of the Star of Sardinia, fourth class. Stephan knew him. He was captain of the monitor *Syrinx*, a squat double-hulled monster which had been hit time after time by torpedoes and mines and seemed invulnerable. With the *Goeben* out the *Syrinx* had gone to Ismailia for safety. And the captain of her was going to hell on hashish. And Farag was sending accomplices to Is-

mailia with supplies of dope and information. No wonder Bek'ahri Bey wanted somebody else to take the job on. Who could blame him? Not Stephan.

The Gyppies were rolling up their little carpets. "Swart enigmas," MacTaggart called them. Stephan turned to the pale-eyed, sandy-haired censor and said abruptly:

"Let's have a peg before lunch. I'll have to run, after."

MacTaggart, who drank almost nothing, nodded. He said to Bek'ahri Bey: "We shall have to handle this by ourselves. No use looking to Cairo, you know."

The policeman seated at his desk glanced at them as they went out, and lit a cigarette in a pregnant silence. He wondered what the lieutenant would make of the news at Navy House. If the British left Egypt Bek'ahri Bey was a nationalist. Zaghloul Pasha would be the man. He drove the smoke in straight jets through his nostrils. But he did not want them to leave Egypt . . . yet.

Stephan said, as they entered the Marina bar, "The French are supposed to watch Ismailia, aren't they?"

"Supposed, yes. But not the *Syrinx*, of course. She's out in the lake."

They stood at the bar among men of all uniforms and ordered gin-and-ginger-beer. An Arab servant in white, with red sash and tarboosh, holding a small brass tray, looked along the line. When he saw Stephan he offered a note on the tray.

Stephan, looking at the small crushed-strawberry-coloured envelope, was aware of eyes upon him. Eyes full of respectful envy or malicious irony. Eyes un-

seeing as the owners of them tilted glasses. Eyes furtively strained to catch the name on the envelope as he held it between thumb and finger.

He read, under an unusual coat-of-arms in scarlet wax:

May I come to tea this afternoon? It is necessary to happiness to see you quickly.

A.

Stephan, the note in his pocket, took up his drink. He felt dreadfully distraught. It was as though his heart were on fire in his breast, the flames scorching his face. He drank the whole glass while MacTaggart, inscrutable as ever, sipped. Stephan gave him a look. He wanted to confide in MacTaggart. He was not sure he could venture and he was unable to understand why that should be. He found himself looking at the note again. A warm flood of well-being rose around him. He heard MacTaggart ordering two more drinks; a peg, and a quinine tonic for himself. They drank, and as they went out Stephan saw the white-gowned waiter with his brass tray waiting for an answer. Suddenly he nodded mechanically.

"I didn't know you were running a skirt," said MacTaggart, outside, in an impartial tone. The words and the tone affected Stephan curiously. They made him feel unsophisticated and clumsy. As though men as a matter of course ran skirts, while he, who was trying to lead a life of monogamic fidelity, were a poor fish without the normal healthy instincts of a modern man. As though he were a green fool to feel that warm excitement, that consciousness of male power, when . . . He tugged at his collar and laughed shortly.

"What are you talking about? My wife's friend. . . ." He laughed again.

MacTaggart was not paying attention. It was of no importance. Stephan bit his lower lip and looked with bright hard eyes at the quay where launches bobbed at their painters. Was that the secret, that such things were of no importance? MacTaggart, reading the private correspondence of enemies and neutrals, men and women, had the calm obliviousness of an omniscient deity toward the appetites and follies of the world. He wrote poems dealing with Coptic maidens and swart enigmas. The inference was that all the men around Stephan were running skirts on the quiet, that Anastasia was assuming nothing unusual when she took instant advantage of the situation. She had nothing to do all day save look after little Eleutherios, nothing to do but think of love, so that in spite of himself he, Stephan, thought of it too.

Back in the office he found Rigby, and they went out on the balcony behind the bedroom to be out of earshot of Mr. Yakoub. Rigby had news. He spoke of an explosion in a transport's engine room, but soon passed on to a rumour he said came from a Navy House marine. Something not so good. Stephan looked at him with a sort of dull apathy in his face. He became haggard as he sat in the shadow, listening to Rigby's maritime murmur.

"It was the second engineer of this transport, the *Cotopaxi*, who was saying he'd been to Navy House about the explosion. He says the old man is a Malay! The chief's a Maltee. The second's the only Englishman on the ship. The explosion blew the cover off the cylinder while they were turning the engines with the gear. The chief's

badly cut about. He's got some cordite ash he found in the cylinder. The second went to report, of course, and the marine on duty at the landing steps says to him while he waited for his boat, he says, 'Well, we'll never see the *Ben-ma-chree* again this side of hell.' The boat came then and he hadn't a chance to find out what had happened. But you see, she ought to be back by now. That's the trouble."

Stephan thought: What's the use? Everybody in the place'll know it to-night. Good God! She ought to be back. How could they keep it away from anybody, if she doesn't come back? He said, quietly:

"Probably just chatter. Better wait. What about this explosion on the *Cotopaxi?*"

"Court of Inquiry. Commander Hanklyn of the *Syrinx* is president. The signal was being made from Navy House as I was on the *Cotopaxi.*"

Stephan got up and drew a deep breath. "Well, he ought to know about explosions," he muttered, and Rigby looked at him in respectful curiosity.

"Does he?" he said uncertainly. "They say he shuts himself up, and——"

"We'd better shut ourselves up," said Stephan briskly. "I have to go to Navy House this afternoon. I'm going to lunch now. You keep the deck till I get back. See all chits yourself."

He ate lunch in the dining room of the Marina, at the table he and Ethel always used. Nodding to men he knew, he looked round. Anastasia was not to be seen. He concentrated on his food and on the problem confronting him. She was coming to tea. He had the sensation of moving with accelerating rapidity toward a chasm, on the smooth dark bosom of an immense stream of fathomless

fecund life. In that dark reflection he saw his own face and that of Anastasia. He thought: What are we here for? To say "Quite impossible"? Was that courage, pluck, endurance, sacrifice for England? Quite impossible, eh? He folded his arms as the waiter took his plate and sat staring at the tablecloth, tense and oblivious. What was he here for? What did he get married for? To live in a house in Sefton Park and have a child, perhaps, some day. Perhaps not at all. Perhaps they would never reach Sefton Park. He pressed his chin on his breast. What was at the back of this resistance he felt in Ethel? What was the game? He had to repress a sudden desire to get up and stride from the restaurant. What was the game? He was being fooled. She was treading on his sense of decency to get out of any responsibility. Why didn't she suggest getting advice from the R. N. O.? She harped on the R. N. O. in everything else, he snarled to himself.

He took a deep drink of mineral water as the stewed prunes came to him. Yes! he was being fooled. Now he came to think of it, what was he married for? All this refined fooling, this genteel delicacy over having children "in war time, dear, it's out of the question," was camouflage for funk. "Self-control, dear!" Rats!

He went on with his lunch, his head on his left hand so that no one could see his face. Coming at four for tea, she was. And there wasn't any funk about her either. Ethel patronized her. "Only decent dago in the place." Stephan raged in his own mind. She might be that; but she was upper-crust, and she was not so much a Greek as a woman! You didn't think of her race when you heard her throaty voice and felt the . . .

He went on with his lunch. Seven prune stones. Coffee, black and strong.

No fear! It wasn't that he had a brief for her so much as that he must vindicate the male in himself. Why, men would laugh if they knew. There was MacTaggart with his cool incurious, "I didn't know you were running a skirt." He took it for granted! Men would laugh. Where, now that it was a question he wanted to ask, did Ethel get her ideas of marital felicity? Sefton Park wasn't a celibate colony. The fact was, she had a horror of the war bride. Well, she was a war bride herself.

As he rolled up his napkin and rose he had a queer sensation of seeing Ethel as other men might see her, yet with a clairvoyant perception of certain extreme intimacies, so that she was like a semi-transparent figure in his mind, an actively moving figure, too, passing athwart a screen of motley and inimical shades. He passed out, thrusting through many of those shades, and seeing others standing at the bar, holding glasses, their heads turned sharply over their left shoulders, like Egyptian figures, looking into the foyer of the hotel. There were Cassar and Mifsud on their way in, volubly conversing. The men off the torpedoed transport outside sat uneasily in a group, their incongruous costumes giving them the air of a party of stowaways. They had been ordered to remain in the hotel and had been forgotten while the navy, in the person of a desk admiral from Whitehall, appointed shore-executive under Patsy Coombes, gave contradictory orders. Being out there, she was not under the R. N. O. of Port Said. Stephan saw them, heads together, gaze with resentful awe at the naval officers, himself among them, passing in and out.

One of the crew was walking to and fro with quick nervous steps. He had no hat on his reddish pugnacious head. As Stephan went out, this young man stepped up smartly and fell into step.

"Excuse me," he said, staring across the street at the Canal, "I'm the chief officer of that ship out there. You don't mind, do you?"

Stephan said, stopping, "Why should I mind? What do you mean, mind? What can I do for you?"

"Well, some of them mind, all right." The young man pulled his silly makeshift cotton jacket closer round his open shirt. "What I was going to say was: do we stay in the hotel without any gear the rest of our lives?"

"Where's your skipper?" asked Stephan.

"He's in some whorehouse in Alexandria," said the young man. "He got money from Ranciulli and went off. He's a Rock Scorpion. We loaded last few times in Alexandria. He has an Italian girl there."

"I see," said Stephan. "Come up to my office."

Stephan pushed the young man into the sitting room.

"It isn't a drink I want, mind," said the young man. "I don't drink much. I want a job. And some clothes."

Stephan looked at him. "You've a master's certificate? Well, will you go mate of a ship?"

"Yes. What ship?"

"A Greek ship. The *Philarion*."

"What's this you're giving me? A surprise package?"

"I ought to hold her, but I'm afraid of the stink it would raise with the Italians and French. She's going to Genoa. I'm going to recommend we put an officer on her to watch our interests. A super-cargo. The old man's a crook. His manifest's a fake."

"Is that all? There are plenty about."

"No. The ship's dirty and verminous. You'll have a hell of a time if you go."

"I'll have a hell of a time if I stay. I've been torpedoed four times, Mister, and I know what it is. They treat you as if they were sorry you hadn't gone down with her."

"Come here in the morning," said Stephan, "and in the meantime, don't say anything to anybody. Your skipper with his Italian girl—how do you know she's Italian?"

"As a fact I'd say she was Austrian," said the young man, looking down his nose in a complacent fashion.

"Exactly! Where is she? What's the name of your old man? And what's your name?"

"You aren't dragging me into it, are you?"

"This is official business." Stephan took out his pen and reached for a sheet of paper on the table.

"My name's Tom Paine. Not Thomas: Tom. Yes, I was christened Tom, so it's not my fault. The tart calls herself Elizabetta. She's in a house in Ramleh Boulevard. She works in the day time somewhere. She's got red hair. She said she used to live in Venice, I remember."

Again he looked down his nose complacently. He added: "The old man thinks he's the only one, but there's an Italian skipper . . ."

Stephan made some hurried notes and stood up suddenly.

"I don't damn well wonder you got torpedoed," he said in a low tone. "Just open your mouth once, and you'll be in quod over this. I've got to run. How do you spell it . . . Portunato? Antonio Portunato? Right. Come in to-morrow."

He waved the young man away and went in to get his sword and a clean cap cover. What a mess for the R. N. O.! And what would MacTaggart say when he heard the latest news of Mrs. Yakoub? Stephan stopped short at the word. He would have to speak about it. He called into the office.

He thought: I don't know whether it's justifiable or not. And then: Good God!

He buckled the belt round him and stood in front of the glass to see the hang of the scabbard. A dress sword, he reflected with the surface of his mind, was the most useless, troublesome piece of ironmongery in the whole world. Deep down he was thinking: a man whose wife's in the Boulevard Ramleh can't be reminded of it—or rather, she's in jail now! Searching through the drawers for a cap cover he heard Mr. Yakoub approach. Stephan remembered that Mr. Yakoub had been bursting to say something about Ethel. No compunction whatever in telling tittle-tattle about the wife of his superior officer. All the same, Stephan couldn't allude to Elizabetta. Instead he said, looking severely at Mr. Yakoub, "Now what were you going to tell me about Mrs. Rumford? Some cock-and-bull yarn you've heard, eh?"

He spoke in a deep, tolerantly bullying tone, like a fifth-form master being jocose. Mr. Yakoub looked at him with an expression of profound consternation. Since the previous evening Mr. Yakoub had struggled with a desire to offer sympathy to a man who was, in his view, in the same boat as himself. The sudden outburst of Lieutenant Rumford in the Maison de Lesseps that morning had staggered him, but he had put it down to the inevitable fierce pangs of discovery. Pangs he had

himself endured in Alexandria, when fellow clerks were to be caught in cafés gazing at him gigglingly over their Arabic newspapers. That bronze-haired woman, with the seductive mouth and blue-green eyes, who had lived on him for a year or two and who had slammed his own door in his face, had brought exquisite suffering to him. He had had great ambitions and a beautiful desirable wife, upon whom all his friends would look with envy, had been the symbol of his lofty conception for the future. When he had survived the ordeal, even to ignoring the pointed sarcasm of his superiors, Mr. Yakoub formulated for himself certain naïve but shrewd principles for his future guidance. He became silent, aloof, and competent. He avoided the young Syrians from Jerusalem and Jaffa who filled the Casino with a sea of fezzes and dark guffawing faces. He lived alone. He secured employment under the government, where a mixed company of French, British, Maltese, and Egyptian youths knew nothing of Elizabetta. And the war took him naturally to the new Naval Examination Bureau in Port Said, where he could assist the short, truculent, pebble-eyed Englishman who now stood, sword in hand, asking him a question that no man should ask of another.

"Lieutenant Rigby have information of private nature," he said dully. "For myself, wishing for commission, it is not good form to speak. Infra dig."

"Infra dig., eh?" mused the man with the black-scabbarded sword, examining George Yakoub with those bright, prominent, pebbly eyes. "But not infra dig. to know a skirt like that Ernestine. Wishing for commission, too!"

"Lieutenant Commander Swaffham have the pleasure

of her company. Mrs. Rumford live in next house. And Bek'ahri Bey tell Madame Ernestine she have good record. I—" he laid his finger on his breast—"take her to Bek'ahri Bey."

Stephan looked hard at the husband of Elizabetta Italiana, whose friend the Genoese shipmaster had put her in jail at last. He wondered whether Mr. Yakoub would hear of that event. No doubt he would. If one could tap the underground wireless of native Egypt the Germans could have the air! But he couldn't know yet. Stephan suddenly remembered that if Mr. Yakoub got his commission he would have access to all the confidential information sent to officers of the Royal Navy. Well, that was the fault of the Whitehall crowd, damn them.

"Yes, I know you did. Very right and proper, Yakoub. But where did you get your cock-and-bull yarn? From the Ernestine person?"

"No, Mist' Rumford. I speak only if Mist' Rigby have information. He tell if you ask him."

Mr. Yakoub, looking sick, turned toward the office. This would be the end of his chances for a commission, from which step he proposed to ascend to a bureaucratic security after the war. He knew Stephan had something against him, though. What it might be only heaven and the English could say. He continually sensed in Stephan a chained desire to kick and cuff him as well as the native Egyptians. As Stephan followed him now he had to suppress a desire to put his hands to his posterior and run yowling into the office, as he used to do when a small boy in Homs. A heavy weight seemed to rest on his breast. He felt black blood pumping and darkening his vision. He could see Stephan at Navy House, shaking his head at the R. N. O., who would glance down at a

paper, Mr. George Yakoub's application. It would come back "not approved."

He heard Stephan's voice behind him. "I'm going to Navy House. You keep the deck, please. The master of the *Philarion* will wait till I return."

Stephan did not look at Mr. Yakoub again. He had an inspiration—the sort of thing that differentiated him from most men with an examination brain. He saw Yakoub as an ally and made a resolution. He thought: You have to make these johnnies as you go along. No use expecting miracles. We can make 'em. Look at Bek'ahri Bey. Use 'em.

The thought lifted him as he strode across among the dark-skinned men on the quay, a pure sexless exaltation of the spirit of man. The launch roared away with him toward Navy House.

V

MEN running, while the hot sun beat down on the Canal. Hoarse cries from Semitic throats. The honk of a motor car and the slither of wheels in dust turning the corner by the Marina. The stutter of a launch at the quay. The staccato of Mr. Yakoub's typewriter, and the sudden squeal of his chair as he thrust it back to go to the door. The *boom-boom* of guns afar. The savage *bang* of guns close at hand. The shrill hysteria of a French steamer's whistle. The peremptory *whupp-whupp* of an out-going destroyer's siren. Men running, with swish of garments and the padding of bare feet on dust. The hot sun beating down, outside the jalousies of the Douane, on the Canal. Hoarse shouts of "Achmet!"

Stephan, as his launch ran into the shadow of a native boat's sail, sprang over the deck cluttered with growling Arabs and reached the shore. He ran toward the Marina. Behind him a battery of guns, pointed skyward, barked in hurried anger. White plumes suddenly appeared high up in the blue where three black specks sailed. The plumes seemed to be causeless apparitions, symbols of etheric creation emerging from the void, while the three minute intelligences, like some mathematical trinity, moved on across the blue in an appointed orbit. Stephan did not look up. He saw Anastasia Callisthenes, with her lace parasol, across the street. He saw her look over her shoulder, an expression of serious concern on her face, as she entered the gate to the Custom House. The men running all around them took no heed

of her. Stephan saw Mr. Yakoub pelting down the street toward the Rue du Nil. A terrific crash among the transports beyond Navy House seemed to darken the world. The guns barked with futile anger and white plumes floated round the imperturbable black specks. Stephan darted over as a hackney carriage, without a driver, suddenly came into view tearing down the street, headed for the Canal, the reins dragging, the flimsy vehicle yawing as the lean animal swerved. He saw someone in the Marina bar beckoning to him to come in. He ran on, up the stairs to the balcony of his office. There was no one there. He could see the men on the quay watching with rapt eyes the course of the enemy planes, which were making for the railway station and the gas works. And there was another heavy explosion on the Bassin Chérif, where the transports lay side by side wedged in by lighters, with open hatches and gaping gun crews, whose armament was for submarines and useless for defence against the hell that comes out of the sky.

Stephan, his hands on the rail of his balcony, trembled as he understood the significance of the moment. He had forgotten his sword. It was lying in the launch. He had forgotten other things. At Navy House he had learned something that crowded out the near events. The *Ben-ma-chree* was ashore on a reef in Asia Minor. Swaffham and one of his men were down in enemy territory beyond Homs. Shot down by Austrian gunners with the newest guns from Skoda. And the other plane had become entangled in one of its own bombs, which had gone off and blown plane and men to pieces a mile in the air.

A fine ending. There, too, were the Turkish planes from God knows what aërodrome in the Valley of Jor-

dan. Hark to that! The Custom House trembled. A boat came out from the side of a sloop, curving in an arc of snowy foam, and leaving steep hummocks of water in her wake. The guns barked furiously, as though foreseeing frustration. Distant guns on the arsenal quay began. The three specks sailed on, serene amid the clusters of white puffs, oblivious of the earth-bound, barking guns.

Stephan found himself in the office, looking with attentive eyes and pursed lips at the familiar scene. How ought a man to look at a crisis of his life? He glanced at Mr. Yakoub's typing and tried to whistle a tune. For a few moments he was as cut off from the world outside as though he were in a diving bell beneath the waves. A transparent hemisphere had descended upon the Custom House. It became a palace of enchantment for the man who walked round the office as though he had never seen it before. Outside, the waves of life pressed close about that invisible transparent dome. An explosion shook the building as he stepped into the shuttered room beyond. He could not see her after the brightness of the day, but he knew she was there. He could smell the perfume, a scandalous thing she had brought from Paris; *Essence des Anges*, which Ethel had called a dago stink. Was it? It made his very heart shake now. Ethel was beyond that transparent sunken bell of glass which shut him in. What Ethel thought did not matter a damn. *Boom!* His eyes grew accustomed to the shuttered dusk; he moved forward, flinging his cap on a chair. He moved forward without conscious volition. In his mind there hung an electric cloud charged with a blind vitality. He was aware of a thought, lurking like a dark figure behind a pillar, which told him that this would happen

sooner or later, and it was no more than wisdom to have it behind him. One couldn't remake the world in six days, whatever the Creator had achieved in the beginning. Casuistry! he thought with a dull obstinacy, that wouldn't have had a chance with him if Ethel hadn't said, over and over again that "it was quite impossible, *out here*." . . . "What," she had once inquired, "did he think she was?" By which she meant, how could he be so inconsiderate. There was a war on, wasn't there? Our duty was to . . . sacrifice.

Boom! The war was very much on. The thought, like a sinuous gleam along the dark polished tunnel of his mind, was that now, at any moment, the war might give Ethel her opportunity to make a really supreme sacrifice. No fear! She'd survive forty wars! Like old Bannister, who would never get sunk. Poor old Swaff! Shot down and a prisoner in Homs. That ended his chances for this war and perhaps would save him from the damned dope and Ernestine. And court-martial.

Thoughts! They faded as he reached the large cane chaise-longue in the alcove by the shuttered curtained window and sat down. She made room for him, drawing her thighs away with a seductive half turn of her body and her dark face swam toward his as her arms enclosed him. He felt her shudder as another explosion, very near, shook the earth, but it was not fright. She was shuddering with an ecstasy he could not know was born of a profound knowledge of the arts of life and love. He was never destined to understand it. He was always to believe that love was an unstained flower, without stamens or pistil or pollen, a delicate water-colour picture of purity. This was shameful. But it was sweet! He had never had any conception of such sweetness. He

found himself taken possession of, struggled for, embraced and caressed with a fierce alternating feral savagery that gave him an answering thrill of primitive brutish desire. Through the noise in his ears and the recurring explosions he heard her voice telling him that at last she was happy, so happy. She had loved him a very long time. She had seen him always with that cold English wife. All Englishwomen were cold, she purred in his ear, and clenched her teeth on it suddenly so that he almost cried out. She believed what she said. She would not have understood Ethel's cold fire for one cold man. The silent tenacious subterranean ferocity which never appears in the light of day was inexplicable to the elemental Cretan woman who had had a Parisian lover, an Athenian lover, a Bavarian lover, and a Syrian lover, and who had dreamed always of an English lover.

He heard her in the darkness, which was no darkness but rather a thick dusk heavy with her *Essence des Anges*, telling him she had—ah! would he kill her if he knew she had even looked at another?—thrown over a rich and powerful lover for him. Before she had known what it really meant to love!

Her deep gurgling voice was close to his ear, intoxicating him with a new and sweet madness of triumph over another man. He listened greedily as she breathed the words to him. He kept pulling his mind away from what was going on outside the great glass bell which seemed to cut off Anastasia and himself from time and space. Here he was in a dimension unpredicted by his examination brain, by the ethics of Sefton Park or Water Street. Something that sounded like jangling metal far off was saying that this was love, this was life, this was what he was made for when the spirit quickened

within him in the beginning. Here was pure being, without which thought was futile and the fabric of empires a meaningless complexity.

The musical throaty murmur entranced him, the perfume drugged his brain. In Cairo she had been so alone, and Neirreddin Bey had been kind. He had influence too, helping her in business matters. But she had sent him away. Now that she loved, her life was no longer waste'. Why had he been so cold to her? Of course, it was so necessar' to be discreet, yes. But the other night she understood him. Ah! The guns! To die now, in his arms, how supreme!

Abruptly, without finale or dramatic fanfares, the raid ended. Stephen heard a man, who had come out of the Marina, remark casually, "Gone away!" A sportsman probably, or even more probably a bank clerk or accountant, with a commission, imitating his betters. Stephan remembered MacTaggart's dry rejoinder when some young radical had protested against the word "betters." "Why imitate them if they aren't better?" old Mac had inquired, and the young squirt had become red and silent. Board school boys with Oxford tonsils!

His mind lifted these irrelevancies before grasping the name Neirreddin Bey. Stephan knew that gentleman by sight. Only by sight. In the Eastern Exchange Hotel he could be seen among other tarbooshed civilians, his broad tussore-silk back set sideways at the end of one of the great lounges and his thick wrists covered with a matting of black hair protruded from cuffs of lavender silk-embroidered madras held by ruby cuff links. He smoked Samsun cigarettes in a long holder of jade and platinum. Stephan remembered Neirreddin Bey because when he had met him that Syrian magnate's eye did not

flicker and swerve in abnegation before a British naval uniform, as did most Levantine eyes. He stared with a steady, critical animosity. He wore in his lapel the purple and green rosette of some Italian order. The accepted notion at Navy House was that Neirreddin Bey was some sort of secret agent for old Pommelet, the Frog admiral. It was up to Whitehall. He came and went, avoiding the British in Cairo and Alexandria, entertaining the French Syrians at Ismailia in his great house on the Boulevard Champollion. Stephan focussed this figure as the lover of Anastasia. Dethroned. She still hung desperately to Stephan's neck as he rose from the chaise-longue. He had a premonition that someone was coming up the stairway. He disengaged himself and went to his desk in the office, thinking vaguely of a memorandum concerning Neirreddin Bey. Ah! He saw the connection as a shadow of the R. N. O. fell athwart the floor. A tall thin shadow thrown by the glare of the sun on the Canal. He saw the connection. Bek'ahri Bey and MacTaggart, looking at each other, had known of Anastasia's relations with Neirreddin Bey and had said nothing. But he, Stephan, had been close to the truth. Farag had an accomplice, the policeman had admitted. Well!

He stood up as the R. N. O. entered calmly and with only a glance, enigmatic and approving, upon Stephan. His face was sharp with care.

"All alone?" he inquired. "Everybody run away? I won't keep you. That business of Swaffham looks bad, Rumford."

"Yes, sir, pretty rotten, now he's strafed."

"Well. I want that book. Find the chief of police and

get it. We'll have some instructions from the admiral in the morning."

"Yes, sir. Is the raid over?"

"Unless they came back. They didn't hit the planes, you know. You're pretty cool going on working!"

"Nowhere to go," said Stephan, looking through papers.

"Just so." The R. N. O. stepped out, pausing to glance at the darkened reception room. "Your wife? She'd better go to Alexandria for a week," he added.

"Thank you, sir. I'll be phoning soon. The nurse will phone soon. I can't leave."

"No. Not now. I have to go to Cairo."

"Yes, sir."

Stephan walked out upon the balcony.

"Everybody full of pluck, as usual," said the R. N. O., gazing down at the Arabs crawling out from under the quay. He turned to Stephan slightly. "I'll report you for this, you know. You'll get a stripe anyhow. And the Croix de Guerre—why not?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, see you later."

Stephan watched him disappear. He heard the telephone bell ringing. As he turned toward it he thought, "Cairo!" MacTaggart had been to Cairo. The Croix de Guerre, eh? And the extra stripe which meant another seven and six a day. What he had always wanted, lieutenant commander. . . . He took up the telephone. He saw Anastasia reënter the dusky reception room from beyond, saw her catch sight of him and with her dark bright smile stretch out her white round arms toward him before vanishing toward the chaise-longue. He bent his eyes to the floor as he heard a clear metallic

voice, "Is that Lieutenant Rumford?" He wanted to answer, "No, it isn't. It's Lieutenant Commander Rumford speaking." He said, "Oh, yes, who is that, please?"

The nurse at the hospital thought a lot of her telephone voice. He saw her in his mind's eye, holding herself erect, elbows out, enunciating with musical clarity a lot of hokey-pokey. Oxford accent, she had. He said, "Well, that's all right. I'll be over in about an hour. The train leaves at six." She said she was so *sorry* she couldn't get him twenty minutes ago; the wires were out of *order*. And so much *noise!* He said "What—Ho!" and rang off.

He thought: she mustn't stay here. And then he reflected that she couldn't, and wouldn't, run down in full view of a lot of Arabs. And he didn't wish her to do that. She had chucked Neirreddin Bey for him. . . .

He sat down at his desk for a moment to think. He must go over to the hospital. At once. But he must wait until Yakoub or Rigby returned. Well . . . He rose and went into the reception room. She opened her arms to him, oblivious of the risks they ran with the world beginning to turn once more.

"I've got to go," he said.

"I know—to the hospital," she said, holding him. "Yes, you go. I stay."

"No. You have come up here to go to the hospital with me, understand?"

"Ah. You wan' me to see her too?"

"No, you can wait in the launch, or the launch can return with you and come back for us. The train's at six, you see."

"I do whatever you like," she breathed, releasing him and looking up with parted lips. "You are master now."

He felt his heart pumping. This was a new experience. He wanted more of it. He felt a savage revulsion against the eternal "Better not, dear." "Better tell the R. N. O., dear." "Was that wise, dear?" He wanted to lash out, bite and kick at the man who had been submitting tamely to it. And for what? Merely to be told that to have children now, to run such a risk was "quite impossible, dear." The strain had been heavy. Now "I do whatever you like" sounded like honeyed sweetness, like stringed music in the garden of love. He frowned and pushed out his lips, savouring the unfamiliar, the extraordinary sensation of having a woman submitting to his command. It had been his illusion that his marriage had been a partnership. Ethel was fond of saying, "I don't think it's fair to expect a man to—do this or that." She called it a partnership. But it had been a dictatorship. She knew how to be icily disapproving, but she had never said, "I do whatever you like." She would say, holding him off ever so little, "Darling!" and get up to do something that didn't matter a damn. He had been the victim of a life-long illusion. Hidden behind the pretense of sweethearts since childhood the ugly dictatorship had grown. Even the business of helping in the office had been only a blind to conceal the full significance of the coming autocracy. He had become so saturated with it that he had advanced it unconsciously himself. He was able to give himself credit for cunning now. He could believe, with this present exaltation of his emotions, that he had planned revolt.

He said, in a low tone, "Not much of a master. Never had a command before." He rose, hearing footsteps on the outside stairway. "Be ready!" he warned, and was sit-

ting at his desk when Mr. Yakoub, a paper in his hand, hurried in and hung up his hat.

"Where have *you* been?" Stephan inquired without looking up. Mr. Yakoub turned uneasy eyes upon the Englishman.

"I was at the consular office," he said in a hollow tone.

"You were going lickety-split down the street when I saw you," Stephan informed him. "I've been looking all over the place for you. I have to go to the hospital. Mrs. Callisthenes has been waiting half an hour to go with me. You haven't much pluck for a chap who wants a commission, even in the R. N. V. R." Stephan regretted he couldn't drop that one on some of the stockbrokers who wore wavy lace on their sleeves and thought themselves naval officers. Mr. Yakoub looked sick enough, however. The R. N. O. hadn't even answered the pointed suggestion that Mr. Yakoub be promoted. Not after last night's session with Madame Ernestine and Admiral Pommelet, anyhow. Stephan, full of the glow of using these fellows, over-did the recommendation. The R. N. O. was accustomed to officers who over-did recommendations to protect themselves. Yakoub's goose was cooked now, though. Patsy Coombes would never hear George Yakoub's feeble chirp.

"You ought to have stuck to your post," said Stephan, as Mr. Yakoub sat down to his typewriter. "That's the way to get promotion." Stephan pinned the papers of the *Cardiganshire* together and laid them on the corner of his desk.

"Give these to Mr. Rigby when he comes," he ordered, "and tell him to find out, from the Canal office, what time to-morrow the *Alceste* is due in."

He gave Mr. Yakoub a final glance in which the disparity of their respective races was manifest, and walked into the reception room. No more dictatorships. He felt powerful and belligerent. The very intrepidity of his revolt would prevent Ethel even dreaming of it. She had him trained, as one Sefton Park lady had put it, and Stephan remembered in amazement that he himself had fondly acknowledged the fact. It had seemed to him a noble destiny to be Ethel's willing subordinate in the "partnership." He saw Anastasia spring up, parasol and gloves in hand, as he came toward her. The mere act gave him a profound thrill of proprietorship, something he could not identify as a legitimate emotion. He had lived his life among the shibboleths of Sefton Park; only on the ship, in the austere discipline of the western ocean fliers, in the Naval Reserve. had he known and touched reality. Now . . .

He said, "I'll see if the launch . . ."

As he stood on the balcony he felt her presence near him and he told himself it was more than incredible. He heard her speak lightly to Mr. Yakoub in French. The bombardment, it was terrible, was it not? She was alarmed! *Quelle horreur! Et quel courage* of Mr. Yakoub to remain heroically at his post! Stephan comprehended the delicate cruelty of her words.

Yes, he had to revise so many misconceptions. She might be a dago, but she was a thoroughbred. And sin, which he had looked upon with an ingrained horror—*quelle horreur!*—he discovered to be absorbing, delicious, and all the more appetizing because of his famished condition and the danger, the dear danger of the sport. He had to revise his ideas of other men too. MacTaggart's Coptic maidens were a symbol, now, of incommunicable

emotions. Pretty Dick, running idiotic risks for his canary satin sorceress, was comprehensible if you gave him credit for passion. Only those men who sneaked into the *Maisons de tolérance* in Alexandria were really contemptible. This wasn't that, by God! Stephan saw he'd been too sweeping, too wrapped up in his own damned troubles, thinking them to be virtues. But were they? He was standing where he had often stood before, looking down at the Canal, and Anastasia Callisthenes was beside him. But was he the same man who had hated all those people? Was he the man who had struggled against the world, the flesh, the devil of treason?

He said, "The blow will do us good. Always cool on the water, what?"

The engine, as the attentive silent Hassan bent over the controls, roared and settled to a steady beat. Stephan took the tiller. As he pushed it over to clear the jetty his hand pressed Anastasia's. Hassan bent double over the intake valve of the water jacket. The awning and side screens hid them from the shore. She was Cleopatra on her barge. The touch of his hand set her body on fire again. Her great full bosom dilated and her mouth sought his in a feral challenge. For a moment they remained in that embrace, the throb of the motor muffling the sensuous rapture of their souls. High above them planes, which had risen to pursue the invaders, were coming back. Launches, glittering in varnish and bronze, scuttled like insects across the fairway, and white Arab boats, with spots of blue and dark sienna and blood red on their lateen sails, stood over, stately and mysterious, on errands to the transports; French *matelots*, unloading shells into a lighter, looked down upon Stephan as he suddenly steered the launch clear of their

dinghy. The end of the tiller was thrust against Anastasia's thigh. She closed her eyes and shook her head slightly in a secret ecstasy.

Stephan, holding the launch straight once more, saw the hospital landing and turned his mind to what was to come. He did not feel the terror he had always anticipated. Suppose, he told himself, he carried out that colourless tacit agreement he and Ethel had maintained, each to tell the other if they ever fell in love with another person. Love! Suppose he brought it crashing down on her head as soon as they got back to the office, or sent her a letter at Cairo! He knew what she would do. He might have had a chance three months ago, but not now. She believed she had him trained. She had reached the stage of the bossy woman who has ceased to regard her husband as a free entity at all. She would take the situation in hand without blaming him at all! She would probably go to the R. N. O. Stephan bent forward frowning as he thought of this. She would think he was suffering from some mental disorder and have him invalided home! Strange that he knew her so much better, as though he saw her through a magnifying lens, now that he had revolted. Stranger still was it that the revolt was a secret. He was to be the same, on her own terms, ha-ha! It was she who had made this possible, with her "quite impossible, dear," and her insistence that Anastasia, a Cretan lady, was a dago. Yes, he could carry it off. The excitement in his manner was due, after all, to the raid. There was the extra stripe and the Croix de Guerre, but he would not mention them. He would keep them to himself. Let her go to the R. N. O. For the duration of the war!

He bumped the boat so suddenly Hassan put out his

hand to save himself from going over. Stephan sprang out. As he grasped the awning stanchion he felt his hand seized and pressed to her lips. The act shocked him slightly before he remembrd that it was his own hand.

"Wait!" he said, loudly, to Hassan, and strode toward the hospital, where grotesque figures in shapeless blue garments tottered from chair to chair or lounged at open windows. Men with limbs enormously bandaged sat in groups like supers in a fantastic play. Stephan entered the great building. He walked with his shoulders squared. It was as though a thin taut membrane divided him from the world. Through it he spoke to office ratings and passed along corridors and up stairways in the wake of a gray-clad orderly. Through it he saw motionless faces in long beds, faces whose eyes moved to follow him. He saw beds with structures like aërodromes keeping the sheets from mangled limbs. He saw men bandaged all over, sitting up in bed reading *John Bull* through a slit in the cotton wool, or waving arms like white bolsters as they talked. He passed on. And the membrane was still there as he came out upon a wide porch, and behind cretonne-covered screens he saw Ethel lying on a cot and reading *The Lady*. She would, he thought, and took her hand. "Well, dear?"

She looked at him for an inadequate moment and back at the pages of *The Lady*.

She said, in a tone of disapproval, that she was not feeling at all fit.

"The R. N. O. said you'd better go to Cairo or Alexandria."

Not at all fit, she went on, as if he had not spoken, and it was really very kind of the R. N. O. to suggest a change.

He gnawed his lip. "The train goes at six. Can you make it? Mrs. Callisthenes is in the launch. Shall I bring her up?"

"Really? It's very sweet of her to come. Of course. Have you seen the R. N. O., dear?"

"At Navy House."

"Oh! . . ." Her face became slightly blank, and the corners of her mouth hardened. ". . . He said you'd been there. . . ."

He thought: She knows I'm holding out something. The chief has phoned. She knows about the stripe. He looked into his cap.

"Swaffham is down," he said, looking round. "They made a mess of it."

"Yes, and there's a bright side even to that," said Ethel with cocky decision. "It has saved him from that dago shopkeeper's daughter. You don't know it, Stephan, but she's been selling him that horrible stuff. He has neuralgia. He told me of it. He was in our flat when I arrived. While you were in Suez. Of course the door was open. He'd made a mistake. Thought it was next door. I asked Mr. Rigby to say nothing about it until I saw you. That flat next door. . . . Well, I think it's a bright side. We don't want our chaps going with dagos."

He thought: Her mind runs on it. Going with dagos! He thought of Anastasia's clutch at his hand, the hot watchfulness of her eyes, devouring him fondly, making him feel that if he wished to set his foot on her neck she would lay herself dutifully. . . . Pshaw! Rot! he told himself. Yet, it was sweet. It evoked an instinctive desire in his heart to play the master. He divined it as something he had missed in the working out of his life.

It was not sin. He knew that much. Sin was something else again. No use talking. It reminded him of that old sailor in the forecastle, a great king-animal of a man, telling the apprentices to save themselves until they found a woman worth while. "Keep out of those sailors' shanties," he would growl. "Wait till you find a piece that's mad to go with you, then you'll know what love is, my boys. All they want in those shanties is your dollars. Love's nothing to those tarts. And I'll tell you another thing. Don't go by looks, boys. The quiet ones are the hot ones. Aye!"

Stephan recalled his great arms and chest and the conviction in the man's voice. He had found it out for himself. It was true. Stephan understood it now.

He heard Ethel laugh shortly. That fat thing in the pharmacy wouldn't see dear old Swaff now. She ought to be locked up, anyway, selling decent chaps that stuff.

"Well, he'll get all he wants now, in Turkey," Stephan said.

Ethel stared. "I didn't know you took that view of it, dear. I'm sorry for Swaff, of course. Will you bring Mrs. Callisthenes? I'll get up. I'm quite all right now, really. I don't feel fit, that's all."

He went down to the launch. She was not quite all right now. There was that look in her face which Stephan knew. She was holding herself in. But about what? She couldn't blame him or suggest going to the R. N. O. about the raid. She hadn't a suspicion of Anastasia either. She would have another look in that case. What was making her so—so *formidable?* Old MacTaggart had a long yarn about the word "formidable." He said it meant giving an impression of controlled power. Noth-

ing that exhibited vivacity or energy could be formidable, said he. Stephan understood it. Ethel was like that. Waiting. Waiting for him to trip and fall headlong. Always cool and self-possessed. He could not imagine Ethel—after he himself was gone, say—falling in love with a man so that she would clutch at his flesh and fondle him. She carried with her, like a faint musty perfume, disapproval of anything she didn't think good form.

At the launch the sun, westering now, had sent Hassan to the hospital building for shade. Anastasia lay back in the seat beneath the awning, gently fanning her upturned face. She was desirable. Grace, strength, beauty. The slender black silk ankles and the thin sharp shoes, as they lay crossed below him, gave him a barbed thrill. On the opposite cushion lay his sword, shining black and gold. She was like that thing, slender and supple and gleaming. He refused to put the thought into words, even unuttered. All his training had been to warn him against the body's beauty, to associate it with spiritual danger. It was as though beautiful women had all been marked, for him, like poison bottles, in red with a skull and cross-bones—Not To Be Taken Internally, eh? And the boy-and-girl romance had kept him what Sefton Park had called "pure."

He bent down and saw the sweet curve of her throat as she lay back gazing toward the Custom House. The sun, through the white cotton side screen, flooded her with rayless pallor, so that her skin was transparent alabaster. Suddenly she was aware of him, her dark eyes burned and she trembled as she put out both hands toward him.

"Will you come up?" he said. "She said bring you up." He thought: Here's a kettle of fish! Taking her up there . . .

Yet it seemed easy enough. He stepped down into the launch as he spoke and she melted to him with a sinewy grace that made his body flame.

"No!" he muttered thickly. "Take care now. Steady, the Buffs." He lifted her to the thwart, helping her to the dock. He stepped up beside her, his hand on her waist, feeling it thrill strongly at his touch. Then they walked, an officer escorting a lady to the hospital to see his wife. What sort of philosophical explanation would MacTaggart—if he knew—give of this? he wondered. But of course MacTaggart did know; all men, apparently, knew of this side of a man's life. They called it "running a skirt." Bah! How easy it was to talk dirt like that. Cynicism. In another mood MacTaggart had been nearer the mark. He had discussed cynicism, called it the canker of modernism, and defined a cynic as a man who had never met his ideal. Ideal! The word had exasperated the old Stephan often. Now he saw that he had had one. He recalled all his vagrant imaginings as puny acts of creation, groping toward a woman like this. Scales had fallen from his eyes. Now he saw. Behind the war and ambition and greed, this vital force was churning men and women into a hot madness; but it was no use calling it sin. A man had principles or he had not. Sin lay in making a mock of it. That old sailor in the forecastle, when a pious apprentice spoke of women as sinfulness, had demanded, jeeringly, "What else are you made for?" Sin lay in the cheap imitations, like Pretty Dick and the girl in yellow. The Yellow Peril, men called her in the cabarets and bars. Whoring was sin.

Stephan, following Anastasia's light footsteps into the hospital and up the stairs, as a man might clump along after Atalanta, was smiling to himself. He thought of the change the last two hours had wrought in his mind, in his views, almost in his body. He felt simply marvellous, he told himself. He had never felt like this before when he had been through the same experience. Never! He almost took hold of Anastasia to turn her round to go back to the Custom House. He gazed at a red-haired freckle-faced nurse with squat bulging hips, who came out of a ground-glass door and whose freckled arms were full of implements. Something in his expression caught the girl's pale eyes and she looked at him with provocative intelligence. He sensed she was emotionally at large. He marvelled at the scope of a man's life. Women running after him. It was strange he had never seen that before. Even that old forecastle Lothario hadn't had women running after him. He had to chase them, he said. Modern women tripped you up, waited for you to beckon, or even came frankly to see you. And nurses were brazen, brazen. . . . The girl, as she turned a corner, looked at him again. And that was that. He saw Anastasia hasten through a doorway and embrace Ethel lightly, with Latin vivacity, and Ethel bent graciously, a faint flush on her cheek, the first since she had fainted. Women. . . . What was the secret of their fluttering lips when they spoke among themselves? Stephan, standing by a window and pursing his own lips, stared at the Canal, all bright and glittering in the afternoon sun, and could not believe his own experience. Then, as his mind moved, like a heavy but accurate mechanism, to get other things into focus, he thought: Not only Swaff and me, but the whole caboodle. Old Bannister and

Ranciulli's "couple of fine daughters." Why not Patsy Coombes, then? And MacTaggart? And . . .

But he had in his mind and soul an image of the chief that could never be overthrown. Gamble was the kingpin of his world, a symbol of England. The contemplation of that lonely figure, austerely commanding men who forgot the high ideal of selfless service to the flag, made Stephan even more incredulous of what had happened to himself. It wasn't as if he had merely fallen for a siren. The chief wouldn't worry his head about that, so long as the work didn't suffer. It was much more serious. It was a transformation of his whole interior existence. It had been going on all the way across the harbour. He could stand on one side and observe Ethel as though she were a stranger, yet with the knowledge of a lifetime to illuminate her soul. He saw the futility of a boy-and-girl romance to shed any light on character. His knowledge had been what MacTaggart called *ignis fatuus;* a will-o'-the-wisp. Passion gave a hot light. He had learned more of himself and these two women in the last hour than a lifetime of Sefton Park would reveal. More of all things. And how would Ethel ever learn anything, if that were true?

She appeared before him, ready to go. A servant was carrying her bag. Stephan, by some vague instinct, took it and gave the man a piastre. Anastasia, fondly embracing, walked with Ethel, and Stephan followed, his eyes on the ground. He thought: This is the limit, all right. Air raids are nothing to this. Yet both were fate. He had intelligence to see that a man could no more avoid what had happened to himself than he could jump out of the way of a bomb. You hadn't any chance at all. It was something inside you like a chemical change. The

righteous probably did not experience it. MacTaggart had once said that "temptation did not exist unless you were unaware of its existence," which Stephan understood, although he couldn't have said it himself. It was a fact! So old Mac knew that long ago! The crust of him, calmly remarking, "I didn't know you were running a skirt!"

As Hassan crouched over the engine, his tarboosh on one side, his mood worried lest the injection water choke with one of those pretty jelly fish like floating amethysts, the three of them sat in formal ease. Ethel took a cigarette from Anastasia, Stephan striking a match, which went out. Ethel was saying, in her rather throaty senior service voice, that it was perfectly absurd for them to let planes come over a place like Port Said. There was absolutely no protection. They might have hit the hospital, or . . . or Navy House! She gave a little hysterical laugh.

"They come too close," said Anastasia.

"To the hotel? Well, of course, it was just a matter of luck."

"They were trying for the ammunition ships and the trawlers," said Stephan.

"Rather poor shots, then, when they hit the Maison de Lesseps," observed Ethel lightly.

"Well, if they set the town on fire it might help the *Goeben*."

"I don't believe anybody knows anything about the *Goeben*," said Ethel.

Stephen thought: She's heard something like that from the R. N. O. He wouldn't tell her what he knows, but he couldn't say so. But he must have mentioned the stripe . . . Lieutenant Commander. Then, if the war

ever finished, it would be on full Commander, R. N. R. which would put him somewhere. He knew Ethel had this on her mind. Yes, he knew she had all sorts of things on her mind, but not him. Quite impossible!

He gazed at his sword on the cushion, and he became aware that both women were looking at him. He had not answered his wife. Ethel had come to the conclusion that he knew something from Navy House he had not told her. Anastasia sensed the tension and began to prattle. Ethel never prattled; never had; never would. Say what you like, it wasn't so bad. She was a woman, this Greek girl! He found his thoughts slipping deep into a delicious sensuality. The straight black scabbard of the sword with the gilt hilt and tip became a symbol of sharp thrilling creative power. . . .

The launch ran alongside the Custom House quay. The women had glanced away. His foot, suddenly stretched out to rest on the side cushion, touched the sword, and they had looked down upon it. It had made Ethel remember vague troubling things. After all, there it was, the symbol of his masculine existence. He had gone into the Cunard and the Royal Naval Reserve without her advice or supervision. His square-toed white shoes reminded her of Sefton Park, to which she desired never to return. A vaulting ambition took hold of her as she stepped up out of the boat. It was as though she were abandoning Stephan and his sword in the boat. Helping her out brought Anastasia facing him. Her dark eyes smiled for a moment, and as he took her arm to assist her her body responded to his touch like a harp string. As he followed he put his palm on her waist. A harp string. She looked over her shoulder, giving him the impression of sinking back into his arms. Ethel, by

comparison, was cool and collected. Ethel was looking down at Hassan, who held in his arms the suitcase and the sword.

"The things, dear," she said, and turned to go in. The quay was in shadow now. Boats were landing men with bathing towels under their arms, bound for the beach below the Continental Hotel. Stephan thought: I need a swim. He reached for the sword. He said to Anastasia, "You coming up?"

"I must go see my little boy," she smiled. "Zen I come."

"I'm going to swim," he said.

"Oh, yes. I come to ze beach, too."

The men with towels hurried past them, looking with blunt, manacled sexuality at the Greek woman from Crete whose French clothes were blown against her body by the warm humid afternoon breeze from the breakwater. A bos'n, prognathous and yellow-haired, boomed out a deep chuckle. Almost audible was his profane ejaculation: "*Dat dere piece o' goots, py Jeez!*" The simian walk, with huge ruddy-haired knuckles holding his brown towel, proclaimed him. Stephan scowled. On the breeze came the words, "She got a shape!" And the voice of a third mate, scandalized, "Not so much of it, Lobscouse. Dry up! Where do you think you are?" Stephan, holding his sword pointing downward, followed Ethel. Hassan brought up the rear.

She's clever too, Stephan thought, as Anastasia crossed the street to the hotel. He did not know that what he called cleverness was the cunning of a universal instinct. He admired her duplicity. There was nothing about her, at that moment, as he walked up the stairs behind Ethel's unsympathetic figure, which he did not

admire. And yet, to his own surprise, as they reached the gallery he put his arm round Ethel, and said:

"Tired, dear? Better lie down a bit."

She went straight into the bedroom.

Mr. Yakoub, looking up from a voucher offered by an Arab in a blue gown, saw his superiors enter. Hassan set the suitcase on a chair. Mr. Yakoub, who had decided to resign from the navy "on account merit having no suitable recognition," ordered Hassan to take the thing in. It was one of Stephan's manias to have no parcels in the office. Everything bare. Clear decks, he had told Yakoub, any naval office being merely a part of a man-o'-war. Mr. Yakoub had put that down to the eccentricities of the English. They based him on H. M. S. *Egmont*, a gray mediæval castle with portcullises and bastions in Valletta, which he had never seen. He would resign. They could, he told himself, get somebody else to wipe their big feet on. What would he do? Oh, he had a scheme! He would like to see Iskanderieh and then go over the sea. Just now he told Hassan in Arabic to put the lady's bag in the reception room.

Iskanderieh! He picked up a paper and went out.

Ethel stood at the door of their bedroom, looking round the reception room. Her eyes fell on the bag. She did not speak. Stephan, opening the shutters facing the Canal, leaning over the chaise-longue, turned at the sound of her step.

"Someone's been in," she said.

"Where? Yes, Mrs. Callisthenes came up. After the raid."

"Oh!"

He looked at her. He felt combative. It wasn't, he was feeling vaguely too, a question of Anastasia at all. Anas-

tasia was there in any case. Anastasia was a separate problem which didn't really concern Ethel at all. This was a question of him saving his soul alive from her firm cold grasp. He had been afraid of losing his soul but he had been mistaken as to the danger. He had even been mistaken about his soul. The soul, he found, was in the body, in the flesh, not to be yielded up, a sacrifice to the worldly pride of a woman who had no part in his flesh, who was afraid of bearing the fruit of his loins. She had said that they had to make the sacrifice, but it was a sacrifice not to the war, but to her own frigidity!

As she turned, expecting him to follow, he looked down at the chaise-longue.

"What's the matter?" she said, turning again.

"Nothing, nothing," he replied. As he glanced down again he saw gold hairpins aslide on the cretonne cushion and the deep indentation made by her shoulders bore a small wisp of chiffon. A wave of reckless defiance swept over him. He turned away and advanced briskly to the bedroom door, following Ethel in and closing it. The Arab servant was in the kitchen beyond, making tea. Stephan waved him down the back stairway.

"Yes, there is," she said and threw herself suddenly on the bed.

Stephan stood motionless, pinching his lower lip. He had to get into the office. He heard Rigby's voice. He wanted a swim. Now . . . Ethel's shoulders shook as she sobbed, face down. He ran over everything in his mind. What was this? She hadn't suspected. And what was more if she had this wouldn't be the result. Oh no! He hadn't known Ethel all these years without knowing she wouldn't start blubbing on their marriage bed because of another woman. She had *absolute* confidence in

him, as he had in himself, apart from this business known as Anastasia. So what was it? He turned to the glass, and he saw her, in there, rise on her elbow, dry-eyed, sullen, black rings darker than ever under her fine eyes, and tie her shoelace.

He thought: She's over-done. She's all to pieces with the strain. I'll not say a word. Get her off on the six o'clock train. She'll be better in a minute.

"Tell me when I come back," he said, and strode out.

He wondered what she would say. He had a sardonic desire to suggest the R. N. O. as a confidant. "Better tell the R. N. O., dear," he said to himself. "Tell the R. N. O. your husband's making a fool of himself over a Greek woman. Nice little problem for the R. N. O."

Rigby, very warm, his helmet on the back of his fair hair, revealing a pallid pink moist face, blew out his cheeks and said, Lorlummy it was hot!

"We'll have tea in a minute," said Stephan. "What about the *Alceste?*"

"They don't know at the Canal office," said Rigby, and Stephan muttered quickly, "If we could find out something they did know, we could win the war."

"It was the pilot who is to take her out told me," went on Rigby. "He is a fat Maltee. He says three o'clock."

"I know him," said Stephan. "You needn't worry. He's all right. He was born here in Egypt. He can smell as far as Port Tewfik. That's his native city, and Port Said is his spiritual home. He knows more than the whole office. That's their way. If anything happens they can say they never told you anything. The French call that strategy. Three o'clock, eh?"

"And she's to discharge the forehold tween decks here —four thousand cases, to R. N. A. S. base," said Rigby.

"And go out after dark. I know that."

He thought: Cassar and Mifsud have come out of their funk-hole by now, surely. Sacred as cats over their *Alceste*. . . .

He suddenly remembered MacTaggart's allusion to Alcestis, something about the Flocks of Admetus. Mac got a strange sort of secret pleasure out of those allusions. When you asked him who Admetus might be, he smiled, corners of his mouth pulled down and his eyes nearly shut in with wrinkles, and said Admetus was a sort of early Constantine—King of Greece. Stephan inquired if he was as crooked as Constantine. And MacTaggart gave the confusing reply that he was and became immortal into the bargain. Which was, Stephan said, a fine lookout for the Allies!

He sat down and opened the mass of papers Rigby had brought from the *Cotopaxi*. Bound west from Singapore with tin for Swansea, she discharges a few hundred tons of hard wood and a few hundred bales of silk for the air service. She has cold engines, and suddenly her cylinder head blows up with a terrific explosion.

Nobody, except government people, thought Stephan, recalling the afternoon's inquiry, would hold a court to determine what had happened. And Hanklyn had stuck with mulish obstinacy to a theory invented by himself that the accident was due to steam getting in. But the engines were cold! Even the teaspoonful of cordite, half burned, lying on a sheet of paper on the table before them in the court room, had not moved him. Stephan had sat without bothering to take notes. He saw Hanklyn's black eyes, like polished marble balls, rolling a combative stare upon his colleagues of the court, daring them to notice his condition. The ribbons on his starched

white tunic were like iridescent plumage. His hands trembled. He made calculated movements to disguise this trembling. He had difficulty in enunciating a long sentence. He said "Now . . ." magisterially, and wetted his lips while the Court and the witnesses and the interpreter waited for some wondrous wisdom to come forth. And when the chief engineer's statement was read, he being all bandaged up in his bunk on the *Cotopaxi*, and it was therein boldly announced that the Arab who came to the ship with stores was probably the agent for enemy acts, Hanklyn had muttered that the Arab must be called. Fetch the Arab! The interpreter had asked harshly, "What Arab?" And then he understood that it was Ranciulli's runner, he had intoned that Ibrahim Farag was released as innocent by Bek'ahri Bey and had gone none knew whither. Then the interpreter, a swart pock-marked man much trusted by Navy House, had looked steadily at Commander Hanklyn.

That, Stephan reflected, seemed to be all there was of that. They had come out of it ready for the funeral, avoiding any allusion to the verdict of the Court "that an explosion took place on board His Majesty's Transport *Cotopaxi* caused by person or persons unknown," when another explosion took place right before their eyes, making them jump like hell. Stephan was watching a gun dangling over the poop of a ship at Navy Quay, men all watching to receive it and lower it on the holding-down bolts. And then, at that stupendous crash on the water, the fellow at the winch had shut off the steam and the thing had come down with a quick dive, its muzzle swinging vindictively as though out to mash the crew. And everybody had hurried. . . .

Stephan had stepped toward his launch, intending to

send it round to meet him at the back of the Chérif Basin. But the explosions made him forget the funeral. The dead were all right. He recalled now the injunction about letting the dead bury the dead. That must have been in the mind of everybody as they hurried away from the open quays where white helmets made fine marks for airmen to aim at. To Stephan it seemed inevitable to get into the launch. He knew if one bomb had hit the water, the next would be on the dock. Ah! And hadn't he, even in that moment of serious decision, remembered that Anastasia was coming to tea?

He now shoved the *Cotopaxi* papers away and took up the *Philarion's*. The R. N. O., standing with bent head by his own desk, had made no comment save to ask, "Where are you going to get him?" when Stephan wanted a certificated man on board as supercargo. When he heard of the mate whose skipper was in Alexandria with Elizabetta Italiana, he sniffed and thought the R. N. T. O. would have to approve.

"I'd have one on every neutral transport, sir," Stephan had said, "as a guarantee of bona fide delivery."

"Would you?" the R. N. O. had remarked. "Good idea."

He didn't think Yakoub as an R. N. V. R. sub-lieutenant was a good idea, however. He wouldn't discuss it. He evidently knew of Elizabetta Italiana. Stephan made no comment either: after saying his piece. You can't make silk purses out of sow's ears.

The *Philarion's* log was fresh as a daisy. It was written in a fine hand in Hellenic script and it had all been written at one time.

"I wonder what this says and where the original one

is," Stephan reflected. "The fellow could forge a bank-note with a fist like that."

To the suggestion that the *Philarion* had her double bottoms loaded with contraband of war, the R. N. O. had given a minute of thought, his face immobile, as if carved of stone. Then he had said:

"Don't detain her."

Stephan told Rigby.

"Don't detain her! Paint a bloody Red Cross on her side and give her a figurehead of a white angel with one hand on her heart and the other pointing to the skies!"

Rigby blew out a great breath.

"I can tell you that one, too," he said. "They won't let her get to Genoa. She'll be taken into Malta. That's the new stunt."

Stephan scowled.

"That doesn't keep me from looking like a fool," he muttered.

"Well, it's from home, those orders. I heard about it the other day. You wouldn't know of it, because it's the sweeps have to do it. They stop her at sea. Signal 'You are going among mines.' Then they board her, and they have your information. Comes from Communications and Signals at Alexandria. They say 'Sorry, but we have to take you in.' And they hold her there while London has unofficial conversation with Rome. That lets us out in the Navy. 'On information received from Intelligence Department,' is what they say."

"What's the idea?" demanded Stephan.

"Doesn't give the Italians a chance at reprisals," said Mr. Rigby. "I have a friend in the Adriatic—he was our third watchman in the *Wyvenhoe*. He says there's fifty ships in Bari and Venice and Ancona—and it's

easier to softsoap the Wops than to build fifty new ships. That's what they call diplomacy, I believe."

"Sounds like it, the way you tell it," said Stephan. "I'm going to do a little diplomacy myself. I'm going to put a supercargo on board. And he has to see everything that goes ashore."

"They'll lose him," said Rigby.

"No, they won't lose him." Stephan opened and slapped the *Philarion's* manifest. "They'll take great care of him. He will be their guarantee they won't be taken in. Everybody knows where this stuff will go if we don't watch out."

"He must want to go to hell for pleasure," said Rigby.

"I haven't asked him," said Stephan. "He thinks it's better than rotting round Port Said."

Along the wall, under the map of the Ægean, ran a bench. Stephan and Rigby looked up and saw a heavy man in a black suit suddenly enter and slide along the bench until his shoulder was supported by the wall. Stephan had the curious illusion that the man had come to accuse him of being unfair to Ethel. He heard the full-throated cough of Rigby as he turned to his own desk—Ethel's desk—and then Stephan looked again at the visitor.

The captain of the *Philarion* wore a black straw hat with a green ribbon. It had an edge like a circular saw. He had not shaved, and his shirt collar was sodden. And he had been drinking.

He held the hat in his hand in front of his breast, as though he had entered a church to pray. His black moustache and black eyes and the black hair matted on his chest where his shirt bulged open made him resemble a Mexican revolutionist. The odour of the whisky, which

he had drunk after a bottle of mastic, came to Stephan.

"You ought to come here before you go to the bars," said Stephan.

The captain of the *Philarion* leaned forward, his elbows on his knees, his hat swinging from two fingers. He smiled, showing several gold teeth. He nodded his head, snarling:

"Yass! You tell me what I gotta do? You? I got your number now. You mate of a ship! I done my bloody time in limejuice tramps. I know you fallers! Now I hear plenty! You get your beeg job with your wife! Yass! I got your number! You . . . Plenty of us would swing for you. You keep my ship. I lose my charter at Genoa. You . . . you."

He hurled his hat with a crash as Mr. Rigby, strong as only sailing ship apprentices are strong by everlasting toil, bore him down to the bench and put a rotund massive knee on him. Stephan stood watching his lips pouting, his eyes like pebbles, round and opaque.

"Take him away," he said, sitting down and drawing the papers toward him again. He picked up the hat and sent it skimming out over the rail. He thought: It's a personal matter, not official. He hates me. He hates me the way I used to hate the mate of the first ship I sailed on. I'm riding him. We're all riding him. The swine!

That order, "take him away," would cut to the bone. And the indifference. He stared unseeing at the papers as Mr. Rigby, glad of a chance to do something he understood, rough-housed Captain Zakalis down the stairs. Stephan went suddenly into the bedroom and shut the door. He knew he was on the verge of discovering something about himself. He knew now he could depend on Rigby. Rigby, who had what Mr. Yakoub called "in-

formation of private nature" about Ethel, would say nothing about it to anybody. He wouldn't even tell him, Stephan, if he asked for it. But Stephan, in the excitement of ordering Captain Zakalis's removal, seeing in that full black Hellenic eye a prototype of other Hellenic eyes, wanted to have it out with Ethel. If she suspected, he wanted to know. He was almost in the mood to tell her that her ideas and his own were not identical . . . (She was over-wrought now.) Well, so was he, He was beginning to think that under the laws of his own country, he had nothing to reproach himself for. You can't marry a man and . . .

She was dressed, ready for the six o'clock train, sitting in front of the glass, looking at herself. The electric fan was sweeping to and fro on the side table. She was just studying herself in the glass. When she was dressed to go away Ethel looked very attractive. She was in red, with a black hat, which gave her face an added pallor in profile. She did not look at her husband. She stared straight at her own image, telling it that if he had accepted the offer she had made when she threw herself on the bed, she would not have gone on with this affair, no matter how much it meant to her after the war. But he had *stood staring like a stuck pig!* He didn't even know she wanted him to come to her. She had done everything, *everything!* Now she would go to Cairo, Alexandria, Heliopolis, San Stefani, anywhere. And she was not coming back to the office . . .

He said, "Ready, dear? You'll have some tea? I'm going to have a dip."

Tea! Dip! She stared down at the reflection of his shoes in the glass and nodded.

"All right. I have to go to Manchester House first, to get some things."

"Sure you're all right?"

She turned her head slowly toward him and without glancing up shrugged her shoulders.

"I suppose I am."

He thought: She has found out and is biting on it. Well, here's a job for the R. N. O., dear.

He said: "I'm getting another half stripe."

"I know," she answered. "I think you might have let me into your confidence at once."

"Wanted to surprise you."

"You couldn't, Stephan," she said calmly. She rose, watching her dress and examining her back in the glass. "I can read you like a book."

"Well, the same to you," he said, not quite certain of it.

She shook her head. "You never have, Stephan. You don't understand. You're so wrapped up in your work, you don't . . . You think all a girl wants in a place like this is a—a funk-hole!"

"What!" he exclaimed.

"Yes!" she chanted, looking into the glass, where was another beside herself, "Poor Swaff! You'll never forgive him for his weakness. You *hound* people. I heard that man outside just now. You have been *hounding* him! And there isn't a soul in the place who cares for you! Respect yes, and fear, I dare say. They give you that. . . . Well, it doesn't matter."

"Doesn't it?" he said in a lifeless voice. "Doesn't it, really? I think you're a bit over-worked. I'm not here to make the others put their arms round my neck and all that. I didn't get this job because I was good-looking.

I'm *here* to hound them. I'm *supposed* to hound them, as you call it. I know all that and I don't care a damn. As for caring for me . . ."

He heard himself telling her that he didn't know naval officers were supposed to inspire affection in the civil population. She shook her head slowly and gave herself a final inspection in the mirror.

"You simply don't understand what I am talking about," she told him. "You're so wrapped up . . ." she forgot what she was saying in her contemplation of the attractive image in the glass. Or it was perhaps the other, whom she saw in there, who had given her a warning glance from his burning eyes, the eyes only she had looked into, eyes cold and impassive to all of Port Said save hers.

He looked at his watch. Four-forty.

"I've to see Bek'ahri Bey a minute," he said, "and I'll be back in one hour."

"All right, dear. Don't bother. . . . You know, last night and to-day have been trying. You can't be expected to understand. All your life you've taken everything for granted. Even me you've taken for granted. No, no tea just now. Or tell him to bring me a cup in here."

Stephan, standing at the table, poured out three cups. Mr. Rigby came in from the office. The nightgowned servant carried a cup in to Ethel. Stephan drank tea without either sugar, cream, or lemon. He drank it now standing, without conversation. He was unable to make head or tale of his wife's remarks. She had been accusing him of being so wrapped up in his work he hadn't paid her proper attention! It was the most stupefying information he had encountered in a month of Sundays. He had sent her off to dances at the Continental while he

worked. He had spent his days and nights looking after his job and thinking of her comfort and safety, and he was informed he didn't understand what she was talking about. He didn't. It was true. He didn't! And he was so wrapped up—her own words—so wrapped up in his work he didn't realize what a girl wanted in a place like this. She pictured him as a dehumanized thinking machine unaware of a woman's fundamental cravings.

As he went down to see Bek'ahri Bey he thought: There's a catch somewhere in this! He told himself there was a catch in it, not because he believed it but to reassure himself. And he grew afraid of such security as he saw ahead. He suspected he would be unable to keep himself and Anastasia in hand. And behind the fear lurked a thrill of the agonizingly sweet fruition of his spirit, as though he had suddenly attained a new plane of existence.

The chief of police sat reading a blue telegraph form with a code book beside him. His face, dark tan with the glossy black moustache hiding his lips, expressed no emotion at all. Bek'ahri Bey had attained to a comprehensive tolerance of invisible authority. Those who have grown up under the Capitulations are fatalists. He believed the English rule was better than either the Mahdi or the French, or even the Caliphate. But he did not invariably believe the English to be supermen.

"The R. N. O. wants that notebook," said Stephan, sitting astride a chair and resting his arms on the back.

"Is he to take the case?" demanded the policeman.

Stephan nodded. "I fancy he thinks it too important to leave in our hands."

Bek'ahri Bey looked down at the blue form. "Yes," he said.

"What's the latest?" asked Stephan.

The policeman rose and took the notebook of Flight Commander Percy Swaffham, R. N. A. S., from a drawer in his desk. He flirted the pages over and then handed it to Stephan.

"Tell me one thing, Mister Rumford," he said in a tone that was clear but did not carry as far as the door. He looked down again at the form, as though reluctant to believe the significance of the ciphered phrase. "Tell me one thing: how does Neirreddin Bey come to know so much of what you do in your office? That you are friend of Cassar and Mifsud?"

"Me a friend of Cassar and Mifsud? What is it to do with Neirreddin Bey whose friend I am? *Who* is he? What is he?"

"Very important man, Mister Rumford," said the policeman. "He has made complaint to the French admiral."

"What's he complaining about?"

"He say you give special favour to Cassar and Mifsud. He say you stop stores going to his ships bound for Piræus. And he say he want protection for his house in Ismailia, which was entered while he was here in Port Said."

"He says a lot," said Stephan in a small dry voice. "Did he say what he was doing in Port Said?"

Bek'ahri Bey lifted his shoulders.

"He is great friend of French admiral, Mr. Rumford."

"He isn't a great friend of mine," said Stephan. "He's an anomaly if you ask me. What's all this about stores for his ships? I didn't know he had any ships."

"He is sleeping partner," explained the policeman.

"Sleeping . . . that's a good one. Not so sleeping.

Cassar and Mifsud are chartered by the French transport office to take petrol to Salonika. What has Neirreddin Bay got to do with that? And if he knows what I do in my office, I'd like to know how he manages that myself."

He thought: I won't get either the half stripe *or* the Croix de Guerre if this breaks. Hell, hell, hell!

He stared at the desk, pebble-eyed, seeing nothing, boring desperately at the blank wall of an incomprehensible enigma. He moved from one possibility to another. Anastasia was out. She knew nothing, could have told nothing. To get wind of Cassar and Mifsud engaging him was not necessarily an office leak. He was clear there. Now, now . . . His lips pouted, as though he were once again threading his way through integral and differential calculus. Suddenly he relaxed.

"What do *you* think?" he asked. Once more the notion had shot through him that Bek'ahri Bey and MacTaggart knew something or suspected something which they would not put into words. "What do you think of Neirreddin Bey?" He reflected that the policeman wasn't harping on the fellow's importance for nothing. "You aren't afraid to touch him, are you?" Anastasia had put that idea, embryonically, into his mind. He had listened without thinking as she had murmured in his ear. He remembered now the air heavy with her *Essence des Anges* and the reverberating bang of the guns. He wanted to hear her voice again. It was like cool water on a parched throat. He smiled as he looked at the policeman.

"We are examining the woman, the dressmaker, again," said Bek'ahri Bey. "We have a clue, but it may be no good. One of my men saw her in a café with your assistant, the young man who sent her to my office."

"Yakoub? You think he is the leak?"

"Nobody knows. But we have to find out Neirreddin Bey's interest in Port Said."

Stephan thought: You have, have you? He was aware of a new complexity. Suddenly the sinister personality of that swart Syrian magnate with his ruby cuff links and implacable coffee-coloured eyes was dominating Port Said. His interest? Where does a man like Neirreddin Bey go when he loses a woman? To another woman. Stephan looked hard at the policeman.

"That Ernestine, does she know Neirreddin Bey?"

"We have a cabman who took him to the Maison de Lesseps several days ago, but he may have visited some other resident."

Stephan put the notebook in an inside pocket.

"You mark my words! That's the connection. She's a Syrian from—Homs!"

"So is Neirreddin Bey's mother," said the policeman. "But there are plenty of Syrians from Homs here, Lieutenant. No," he added, "that's not the connection. Neirreddin Bey was at the Marina two days. He left in the evening but he was not on the six o'clock train. He left next day, you understand. I think he was at the Constantinople Divan."

"There's your connection," insisted Stephan, taking a step and returning.

"No," said Bek'ahri Bey. "This is the connection: The night he was there—we are examining the woman who keeps the place—Farag and those two men from the *Cardiganshire* were arrested for selling hashish to the girls in the Divan. When we arrested Farag he defied us to bring him into court because he said he would give names of English officers who were his customers. When

we said we would turn him over to the French he laughed and said he had a good friend in Neirreddin Bey."

"Why didn't you simply arrest Neirreddin Bey then?"

The policeman raised his eyes gravely and took a cigarette from the box in his drawer.

"Because Neirreddin Bey was that next night a dinner guest on board *Syrinx* at Ismailia, with Captain Hanklyn going to his house in Boulevard Champollion later. The bey gave a big dance for Canal officials."

The match flared close to the policeman's face. Stephan turned half away and stared at a map of the Nile Delta. He saw the long green worm of the inundations wind through a pale olive desert to a maze of intestinal passages. That was what MacTaggart called "disemboguing Nile." A poetical quotation, no doubt.

"It's a wonder Farag wasn't there too. Perhaps he would have been if you hadn't locked him up," he said sarcastically.

"It was Farag who got the information from your office, when you refused to pass the requisition."

"Of course I refused to pass it. It had a forged signature. Captain Bannister's. What ship is Neirreddin Bey a partner in? A sleeping partner!"

"A Greek ship. The *Philarion* . . ."

Stephan turned his back on Bek'ahri Bey and walked to the door, his head down. Then he turned and shook his fist at the green sphinx that adorned the lower corner of the map.

"I tell you this, I wish to Christ they'd take me out of this damned pest hole and put me on a ship!"

VI

BACK in his office he asked himself "Now what?" Ethel was in a train rumbling and squeaking toward Cairo. She would go on to Alexandria, perhaps. She had been abstracted, gentle, and impenetrable as he waited for that train to start. The chief had sent a bouquet. That was decent of the R. N. O. Ethel had looked at the flowers as if they were poisonous. She must be very unstrung. Sat staring. A few days at Alexandria would set her up. . . .

So he had reflected in the cab coming back; but now in the office he said, "Now what?" To sit staring at those flowers, to take no notice when he bent down to kiss her good-bye . . . she had jumped to some conclusion. All that palaver in the bedroom was the first stage. She was in her stride now. He was being sent to Coventry. For the duration of the war, no doubt.

The point was, he told himself as he went in to change, that no matter what line she took he had absolutely no justification in taking advantage of her absence. He knew what he was doing. He was committing adultery. Call it by any other name, that was its label. To blame Anastasia was a piece of despicable skulduggery. The trouble was he couldn't help blaming her in his mind and loving her in his heart. She had given him what he had never had in his life before—passion, ecstasy, and a fulfilment of his whole being. She had understood with a hairspring intelligence the rhythm of his blood. She had captured his imagination, filling his mind with sensuous and sensual delights and the pride of sex. Ac-

cording to Ethel's standards Anastasia was a strumpet; but he didn't think of her in that way at all, he discovered. She was a woman of amazing skill in the art of love. She had abdicated in no degree from her position as a lady in his estimation.

He tried to formulate a line of conduct which, if she followed it now, he could approve, but he hesitated. He hesitated on the very brink of a discovery of prime importance—that a woman's conduct can never be formulated or predicted because of the angle of refraction which distorts her vision of her own motives. Stephan did not perceive this. He was halted by the less subtle thought that what she ought to do had no bearing just now.

Under the shower he reviewed the work of the office. Rigby told him Cassar and Mifsud had called and said their chief engineer was sick and would have to be relieved. Was there a substitute for him? Stephan had seen the fellow Marcù on the platform just in from Suez. He might be Dismissed the Service, but he was a good man. Stephan told Rigby to get him. He was courting the chemist's daughter, Miss Merola; they would find him there. Rigby had got hold of him too, and shoved him along to Cassar and Mifsud. That was a fine thing about Rigby—he took hold without giving you the impression he wanted to be boss. Rigby even got on with Yakoub. Yakoub was necessary in the office because he knew the lingo, the customs laws and tariffs, and he knew where things were in the files. There was a quiet massiveness in Rigby's psychology very like the solidity of his physical presence. Rigby had, *par excellence*, the reserve muscular weight of men who have been in sail, pulling the old man ashore in West Coast ports, working weeks on end in stinking holds, with tobacco and

hides and heavy general. He had handled Captain Zakalis with the quiet force of a hydraulic crane. Up and out!

The thought of hydraulic cranes sent his mind back to Farag's attempt to get a pass for all that glycerine. So it was for the *Philarion*, and Neirreddin Bey had a finger in that pie. That might explain why the chief, tight-lipped and almost disapproving, had said, "Don't detain her." No! Gamble wouldn't give one fig for Neirreddin Bey's drag with the French. That was just foolish imagination. But there was something . . . Stephan frowned as he towelled, pouting his lips, his whole mind concentrated on his work, which was the defeat of the enemy in Egypt. There was, of course, the general policy of "sweetening the organ-grinders," as everybody called the Italians. They didn't seem to be doing much except holding a tidy bunch of Austrians in the Carso; but Austrians would never fight on the western front anyhow. They were rolling down behind the Bulgars nearly into Salonika and it took a million men to hold that stinking Balkan front. Yes, we had to sweeten the ice-cream chaps, and holding up the *Philarion* was no way to do it. But Neirreddin Bey would have to be stopped. Of course the chief knew about that now; nevertheless the *Philarion* would sail to-morrow for Genoa. That hungry looking red-head, Tom Payne, would be on board anyhow, and there would be no glycerine.

The thought of Neirreddin Bey inspired Stephan with a cold doubt. That dark-skinned customer must be tremendously sure of himself to rig a wireless on his house and install a Tuareg orchestra to distract attention. The irony of the situation was that the smallest of transmitters would reach the Turkish advanced posts

south of El Arish. A pilot had been hit in the face by a rifle bullet while taking a ship through the Canal, near El Kantara. And we were supposed to have a strong force out to guard the railway which was pushing slowly toward Gaza. The sandbags were piled high on ships' bridges but pilots had to look over the side sometimes in a canal. Ragged volleys in the dark, the crew blinded by their own searchlight, which made their ship as easy to hit as a church at fifty yards. Well, that was the army's job, he told himself sardonically. The wonderful British Army of Brass Hats! MacTaggart had said there were seventy-two generals in Cairo alone. Like a Central American republic, by God, except that none of them were ever likely to be taken out and shot full of holes against a wall! Stephan's father had told him of a thing like that, in Venezuela in his young days. Stephan told himself now, some of those fellows in Cairo were full of sawdust. What was that expression a passenger had once used in conversation? A millionaire from the Middle West he was. Ah, "a stuffed shirt." That described some of these tabbed and spurred fellows exactly. He had been at Stephan's table on the *Lucania*, a clean-shaven man with shell-rimmed pince-nez on a heavy black ribbon. From Chicago. Mr. Pattison J. Premru. Stephan had been handed a card and invited to visit Mr. Premru "any time you're in Chicago." To hear Mr. Premru the Cunard ran a branch line overland. Stephan remembered the strange barbarian name and the succinct phrase, "he's a stuffed shirt," describing an American politician with a great reputation.

In those days, Stephan recalled, he had had the idea of getting one of those rich Americans to take him up, give him a job in the States, and so on. Very vague and

based on tall stories bandied about the junior officers' mess. Now he wondered. It was sticking like a sharp thin thorn in the soft flesh of his soul, that phrase of Ethel's—"you *hound* them!" Did he? Was that why men looked at him with sullen dislike at times? Well, you had to chase the lazy swine. He tugged the comb through his wet hair and gave his own squat muscular reflection a faint abstracted smile.

Because he was, at that moment, in purgatory. He couldn't shut his eyes to the fact that he was two men, and the brief states of transition were like major operations without anæsthetics. Sometimes his brain, working with the precision of a gyroscopic mechanism, lifted him clear of the mess he seemed to have got himself into. Then it didn't matter what his body was doing, nor who hated him. But that phase would pass. He couldn't be a cad! But if that was being a cad, what did a gentleman do in a case like his? *Quite impossible!* He found himself impaled on that sharp phrase as soon as he tried to take the blame. It was when he remembered Ethel suddenly flinging herself down on the bed, and then, suddenly rising, feeling for her shoes, that he was in purgatory. It made him feel a contemptible cad. How often had they said, "We have each other." Had they? Well, she felt something had come between them—perhaps had heard something. And they no longer "had each other." They had been pulling different ways. "Better tell the R. N. O., dear!" What she wanted was to run the show. She had never given him credit for the work he had done before she came out. All he had had was a dirty unscreened room in the Custom House and instructions to start an office. An assistant paymaster came over from Navy House and went on the sick list at once. He had had

to swipe a typewriter and learn how to pick out the letters, and then they shot Yakoub over from Alexandria. He'd had to invent his own system because the navy believed apparently in inspiration. The navy was right too! What use would it have been to him to know what was doing in Malta? The conditions were different in every port.

He took a long stare down the perspective of his record. "You *hound* people, Stephan!" Humph! MacTaggart once said Sisyphus had nothing to do compared with himself. Stephan had looked Sisyphus up in the books. Rolled a stone to the top of the hill and then had it roll down on him at night. Stephan had told MacTaggart it indicated a typical Greek lack of system, which had made old Mac laugh. It was true, however. Stephan's favourite symbol was a chap trying to plug the leaks in a breaking dam. A twenty-four-hour-a-day job, of which nobody at home knew nor cared. The public's conception of "The Navy" was a motion picture of bluejackets doing physical jerks on the deck of a thirty-thousand-ton battleship. Our Boys in Blue! Remember that horrible old music-hall song the apprentices used to bawl out?

We've got a Ni—vee!
The British Ni—vee!
Our friends all know that's true,
And it keeps 'em in their place
When they know they've got to face
The lively little lads in navy blue!

It didn't keep the *Gocben* in her place, anyhow, Stephan reflected. Drivel like that was the rotten spot in patriotism. You couldn't get patriotism into a song. And

you couldn't get the navy there either. Sons of the Sea!

No, she'd taken for granted that the office was running because she was in it. The R. N. O.'s deference had gone to her head. Stephan admired him, as Mac said, "this side of idolatry," because you were no good if you didn't keep your eyes in the boat most of the time.

Dressed in a fresh suit of white drill—the third that day—rather frayed on the lapels, he went into the office again and looked round. He wanted to get out of this. He had a sudden vision of one year on manœuvres, when he had been taking his annual training, on a destroyer in the North Sea. Dawn over the dirty gray-green shallows of the Scheldt while the great flaring bows sliced through the short green seas crested with a creaming lather that lay flat and patterned on the hollows when flung. Dawn, and a cold, cold wind above the dodger that took your breath and made you wink. Thirty-four knots. The high drone and muffled squealing of the turbines, the truculent downpouring black oil smoke like a black béret on an Apache head. The hot cocoa and buttered biscuit. The silent association of serious thinkers in the wardroom. The spat and crackle of the wireless. The comfortable plump clouds over England. The deep, deep slumber in the tiny cabin, head close to a bulkhead ringing with a myriad notes. A man's life!

The pride he had had in his work was shot with disillusion. An extra half stripe and the Croix de Guerre would be good things to take on the bridge of a ship. If he got them. He would have to ask MacTaggart about Neirreddin Bey and his exploits. He took his cap and cane and went out, locking the door. He wondered what Mac would say about this desire to go to sea. For a moment he looked down at the dock where men were com-

ing ashore in squads, stepping smartly toward "the fleshpots of Egypt," as Mac called the shanties down in Arabtown. And as he waited there on the gallery, like a commander on the bridge of his ship, he heard footsteps coming up. He turned to see Messrs. Cassar and Mifsud, with shiny shoes and serious prominent dark eyes over black moustaches, raising their hats.

"Lieutenant," Mr. Mifsud speaking, "we have had some news from Suez. The ship is delayed."

"What's the matter? Who sends the news?"

Mr. Cassar spread a telegram:

To Cassar & Mifsud, Port Said.
Loading suspended pending settlement local strike.
Anglo-Sinaitic Petroleum Company.

Stephan looked at it as it was held before his face. He pinched his lower lip between thumb and forefinger, appraising the news. The R. N. T. at Suez would get men to finish her, surely. And where would he get men in Suez? The *Reynard* was gone out to target practice. And the chief was gone to Cairo for the night. Stephan unlocked his office door again and took up the phone.

Messrs. Cassar and Mifsud, looking down at the dock, side by side, like grotesque statues seen from a cathedral roof, were framed in the doorway. R. N. T. O.? What? Oh, H-m! Stephan rang off. Well, he would be at this hour. Have to see him. He went out again and the two figures swung round to meet him.

"I'll see what can be done. Better wait till the morning." He started to move off.

"But, Lieutenant, the charter-party makes no allowance for strikes. We did not suppose any strikes——"

"No, I daresay you didn't. Well, you can bet your

boots the Anglo-Sinaitic didn't start a strike for fun. We'll get her loaded. Don't worry."

But as he hurried toward the Eastern Exchange Hotel, he worried himself. He was half inclined to dig up the R. N. O.'s secretary. And then he was very much against that course. There was a touch of patronizing superiority in that fellow with his monocle which Stephan avoided. And if the R. N. T. O. had heard of this strike he would think Stephan an ass for butting in. On the other hand there'd be a beautiful stink if Stephan didn't make sure. There was one thing only to be derived from G. H. Q. orders about petrol in Salonika. They were running low. Everybody seemed to be aware of the fact without any word being uttered. There had been several ships sent up with deck cargoes and most of it was smashed and lost when they got into Ægean squalls. A ship from home had been torpedoed. Another was in Malta with a broken propeller. Extremely low. Quite apart from the air service land transport was being seriously hampered by the shortage of petrol. The *Alceste* would restore the base to normal efficiency. Stephan had seen, on the chief's desk, the memorandum. Very temperate in language. "Considerable inconvenience is being experienced by all branches of the Services by the prospective shortage of petrol." And Stephan had wrinkled his nostrils a little. What that meant was the staff lads couldn't get cars to take 'em out to golf. The cruel hardships of war!

He came to the Eastern Exchange and turned in, swinging his cane. The place was full of uniforms drinking. Beyond the stairway more uniforms, sitting at little tables in the garden. Men going up and down stairs. The great lounge thronged with them. All, Stephan said to

himself, having a damned good time. He ascended the stairs. Commander Beecham fancied himself with the cue. Many shipmasters did. Stephan's father. The billiard room, an immense chamber over the street, with six tables, was full, too. Men sat in rows watching. At the far end Stephan saw a stout figure with an amber-stemmed calabash pipe, a huge golden horn with a gold band and broad gold top. A cornucopia of a pipe. More like a trombone than something to smoke, thought Stephan, who was no smoker. They say tobacco steadies the nerves, but you have to have steady nerves to stand tobacco.

The stroke completed and the score glanced at, the R. N. T. O. stood, cue in one hand, great pipe in the other, his short trim beard jutting. Seeing Stephan's face he walked toward the door and the two of them paused in the corridor. Stephan told him the news.

"Where'd this come from?"

"The manager of the Anglo-Sinaitic. These chaps, Cassar and Mifsud, own the ship."

"Are they all right?"

"Yes, they're all right, sir. I surveyed the ship for them. She's a wreck, but she'll get to Salonika."

"H-m. Why can't the Anglo-Sinaitic . . . No, we'd only have trouble later. Well, how would this do? The *Nigeria* is due at the Canal to-day. She's a big meat boat, twelve thousand tons. We've too much meat just now, because of those troops going to Stavros. We can let the *Nigeria* tie up and her crowd can go over and volunteer."

"That's a good idea, Commander. Shall I put it through?"

"As a suggestion to the R. N. O. That he has my approval to detain the *Nigeria* for a day and to ask for

volunteers. You can get the code? Well, that's the best I can think of. There's a lot of soldiers lying about in Suez but they're sick mostly. And it's a devil of a place. No other ports near it to draft natives from. They all belong to the same sect, too. Have a drink?"

"Not now, Commander. I'll get this off."

"And bring me a carbon of the message, will you? I like to see what I've signed."

The R. N. T. O. held his cue like a halberd and walked back to his game. He looked Elizabethan. He had been on an Antarctic survey, and he would have seemed at home in a steel corselet and a plain ruff. Stephan went down.

He would have to go to Navy House for the code. He called a cab. As he stood under the arcade, waiting, he saw young Marcù with the Merola girl at the door of the shop across the street. Now why, he wondered, couldn't the navy people see that chap had quality? Stephan had studied the broad heavy face at the court-martial—a face saved from brutishness by keen gray eyes. He had a look of solid competency as he stood talking to his girl, his short thick legs ending in small feet. His hands, Stephan had noticed, were damaged by work but well shaped. Now here was the stuff to make the local navy of, with his girl and all. They'd fight like madmen for Egypt, which was all we could expect of 'em. But nobody could see it. Stephan was a man who had no pluck when it came to abstract ideas. He was afraid to utter them. That one, to have an Egyptian army and navy, he had glanced at more than once. Same as the police. Well, you had to be an admiral before anybody took any notice of your ideas, so what was the use? You had to keep in line, jump to the word of command, use your head—to

get out of trouble—and let the bigwigs do the thinking. So Mister Marcù would go chief of the *Alceste* for a voyage. Funny how the navy seemed to remain, even after some asinine performance, a god-like mechanism. Here they had kicked out a good man and lost their finest ship and got another beautifully torpedoed almost in the Canal entrance, and yet Stephan felt a thick surging of blood to his heart as he thought of the Service. God, how he wanted to get back on a ship! He'd have to . . . to get on a ship. Now Ethel was gone, he understood his own deepest desires, to be afloat once more.

Rolling tinkling through the deep dust he reflected: safe out there! Like going into a monastery. A gray steel-turreted monastery, where men are immured in tiny steel cells, meditating on death—for other trappists! He wanted that before he lived again with Ethel. Perhaps when she was really solitary on shore she'd begin to realize . . . He would ask the chief when he came back. Hang it, there was nothing criminally unreasonable about such a request. He ought to stay where he was, of course, but he felt he couldn't. There was Anastasia.

She would be waiting for him at dinner. They had dinner at adjoining tables or the same table every night. Everybody in the place who had eyes had seen them together everywhere. Ethel's friend. Soon after they were married in Cairo, Anastasia had reached Port Said. Neirreddin Bey had been about quite a lot then. Stephan remembered. And he remembered also what good old MacTaggart had said, of something they were discussing. "People pay," said Mac, "to have their memory for facts trained, so that they can remember only what is of use. They ought to have their memory for emotions

trained so they could forget humiliations and despairs and hatreds." How did he get to a conclusion like that? It was true; but most of us forget easily enough. There was a certain limit to human sensitiveness. Nature automatically throws out the switch most of the time and a man's mind is insulated from any feelings toward a former rival. It was, Stephan thought, frowning, like an equation cancelling out . . . He did not want to think of Neirreddin Bey, which was strange, because with another part of his mind he did. He wanted to think out how far Neirreddin Bey was behind all these small difficulties. He might even be behind this strike in Suez. It would be a miracle if a rich Levantine like him had not shares in the Anglo-Sinaitic. Stephan went into the S. O.'s office.

The Signal Officer had something to do with Intelligence and a great deal to do with Communications. The officer on duty behind the row of signal-men at the keys and typewriters was listening to a telephone conversation with great earnestness. It went on for a long while. Then he wrote and wrote on a pad. Another signalman came down a spiral iron ladder from the tower with a pad. Then the officer waved to Stephan, who advanced.

"I'd like the code for this," said Stephan. He wrote down the R. N. T. O.'s message.

"Anything else?" asked the Signal Officer.

"Yes, only make this please at once. I fancy it's urgent."

"Is that the boat that's loading for Salonique?"

Stephan nodded as the other transferred a lot of gibberish, "combination of Maltese and Algebra," Stephan thought, to the big pad in triplicate. There was

a soft hiss as they were torn off. Stephan took the green carbon.

"Your wife all right?" said the other. "They told me she was in that strafe last night."

"She's all right. Gone to Cairo and Alex. They nearly hit the house. Bomb outside. Fetched all the plaster down."

"I was sitting here," said the other. "It sounded terrific. But nothing touched us. Same this afternoon."

"Yes. I was in my office. Hits all round."

"Really? What else was it you wanted? You said something——"

"This: How can I get a list of the shareholders of the Anglo-Sinaitic Petroleum Company?"

The Signal Officer looked at Stephan for a long while and then at his own finger nails.

"Up to date," added Stephan, and received a nod. The Signal Officer, whose name was Stukely, reached for a year book and scuffed at the leaves. He put it back and reached behind him for a thick pink gazetteer. For a minute he was absorbed and then pushed the open volume under Stephan's nose, pointing to a line of print.

"H-m . . . No reports published. Subsidiary of Near East Petroleum Products Company, Great St. Helens, London, E. C. We're just where we were."

"You'll have to get hold of some business chap and pump him," said Mr. Stukely. "I admit it doesn't sound promising. But they don't publish the names of directors or partners here yet, let alone shareholders. What's your problem?"

"I was wondering why that Neirreddin always seems at the back of my troubles," muttered Stephan. Mr. Stukely lit a cigarette and lay back, sending a vertical

jet of smoke from his lips. "You know the one I mean."

"I do. There's a lot of code stuff going back and forth over him just now."

"Two first class European powers afraid to lock him up," said Stephan.

"Want to have something definite to lock him up for," said Stukely.

"They'll never get a better chance than now."

Mr. Stukely looked down at his desk.

"I'm going to eat dinner," went on Stephan. He had been about to say that even if the *Syrinx* got a new skipper the war could go on. But he saw it wouldn't do. What did it matter anyway? You had to be on guard all the while against *useless opinions*. "Thanks for the code."

"Are you going to the dance at the Continental?"

"I didn't know there was a dance at the Continental."

"There is. All the town people are going. Rather a grand affair, I believe."

"That's right. I'd heard and forgotten. I've had a lot to do these few days. I may look in."

"I hear a lot of nurses have come down the line. Going to Malta on leave."

"It ought to be marvellous."

He went out into the darkness. The west was an immense bar of cooling red-hot iron. The domes of the Canal Building, of green porcelain, seemed faintly phosphorescent. The ships, lying in ranks of raked masts and funnels, like steeds pulled back on their haunches, were beautiful. So were the native craft with their superb-soaring gaffs and secret crews under the shadow of antique prows. Now and again it penetrated to his soul that Port Said was beautiful. He thought so now. Pagan

beauty. There was nothing of his own time and place about it. It was a foreign port and he was a seaman. There you were down to fundamentals. "A lot of nurses coming down the line!" It would certainly be marvellous for those like Pretty Dick, who were fond of nurses. And yet Stephan knew that he wanted to go, not to dance with the nurses but to register his freedom, to take Anastasia.

He found a boat at the steps and as the Arab rowed him toward the Custom House he wondered how much his hunch was worth, that Neirreddin Bey was interested in the Anglo-Sinaitic Petroleum Company. It sounded daft on the surface, that a man owning shares in a business would be behind a strike of the workmen. Stephan knew that some of these rich natives were playing a long deep game. The toiling millions of fellaheen were a rich spoil, as Ismail had proven. If we withdrew, thought Stephan, the pickings will be worth all of twenty oil companies. Indeed, they would have the oil companies into the bargain. Patriots like old Zaghloul were cat's-paws for astute financiers and wire-pullers like Neirreddin. Stephan played with the idea. It was his own inspiration. He was beginning to believe that Bek'ahri Bey had known of this all along, that Neirreddin was mixing up Port Said. Certainly these troubles began since Neirreddin had been here. Since he had lost Anastasia.

MacTaggart, who lived in the Marina, was sitting on the balcony outside his room. Above and beyond Anastasia's. Stephan had a sudden impulse. He had been up there a couple of weeks ago, before this business had started. Then, he reflected, startled, he had disliked her. Or had he? Had he not simply given her no thought and merely aped Ethel's superior note? Given her no thought, yet been aware of her! The seed had been in his mind

under rough dead soil of conventional thinking. He had known nothing of it as he stumped along the Marina's corridors, looking for MacTaggart's room.

Now he had the impulse to find out from MacTaggart about Neirreddin Bey. Mac rarely went down to dinner.

As he passed up the stairs Stephan saw all the heads in the bar turn and stare. They would. Some of them had seen him receive the note which had led to Anastasia coming over that afternoon. The blood went to his head for a moment, so that things lost their shape. Who cared what a crowd like that saw or conjectured? He went on up, and soon reached the bare chamber, with its bed, dressing table, wardrobe, and writing table where MacTaggart camped. He was at a table on the porch, smoking a pipe. His sandy skull, rising up out of the folds of a bathrobe, made him look monkish. A monk gazing down upon the wickedness of the world. He looked up as Stephan entered, and raised his hand in greeting. When he heard what Stephan wanted he sat for a moment in silence. Then he smiled.

"I not only think, I know he is at the back of a lot of the rascality we are discovering. But you'd better tell it to Sir Spencer and the Cairo crowd. They will pat you on the head and say you have the Hidden Hand on the brain! As they did me. But why worry about it? His case is neither yours nor mine, but Army of Occupation. I assure you I have my eye on more than Neirreddin Bey, but nothing is likely to be done about it."

"But we can have him over this *Philarion* business. That's my department."

"Not necessarily. He can claim to know nothing of what the captain, Zakalis, is up to. In fact, I shouldn't bear down too hard on that, Rumford."

Stephan stared at MacTaggart.

"Why not?"

"Well, I'll tell you why. Because one can jump to conclusions that may turn out to be unfounded."

"For instance?"

"Well, for instance, yourself."

Stephan looked hard at the monkish man who was reaching for a match.

"Would it surprise you to know that men are saying all sorts of things about you?"

"As for instance?"

"That you—this is too absurd—are a partner in the *Alceste* and are using your official position to get her a better charter and feather your nest. Profiteering, in fact."

"Better tell 'em I'm making a thousand a year in my spare time. Tell 'em the chief is so pleased about it he's recommending me for the Croix de Guerre, for profiteering under fire. Tell 'em to go to hell."

"All right. But is that true about the Croix de Guerre? I congratulate you."

"And another stripe."

"I congratulate you. You've been missing all the fun by being stuck here. It's only fair."

"You knew, then?"

"Something of it reached me at Navy House. Now you'll hear in time that you wangled that yourself, that you got a medal for sitting in an office."

"Mac, you're right. But do you know the answer to all this? It's that I'm sick to death of the whole business. I want to get out of it. Port Said is not a place, it's a state of mind. I'm going to ask for a transfer to a ship at home or out of Malta. You think I don't know how

men outside look at it? They say, 'Fine fat job he's made himself. Got his wife 'longside of him all snug as a bug in a rug. Plenty of coomshaw, palm oil, and bakshish.' That's what they say; 'making all kinds of money.' I can see 'em leaning over the side of the ships when I go off in my launch. Well, they won't say it much longer. When the chief comes back I'm going to ask him to put it through. I'm going to sea. And then I shan't give a curse whether Neirreddin Bey is in communication with the enemy or not. That'll be your job. I'm fed up, fed up, fed up!"

"What about your wife?" asked MacTaggart, looking at his pipe.

"She'd better stay here in Egypt."

"Would you call that a wise decision?"

"I don't know what I'd call it—wisdom is largely a theory. When you're married, you know. You only make an approximation. That's what she would want to do. She doesn't want to go back to England before the end of the war. I know that."

"Come, come! You're stale. Apply for leave. You've all of six months in. It's coming to you. You've been working too hard."

"Yes, I'll have my week's leave all right, when I've been appointed to a ship. I've been thinking of this for some time."

"About a day? This raid has upset you. And the Swaffham business. I admit I understand your view. It is disheartening. But you have support higher up, which I, at any rate, lack. The R. N. O. has always backed you."

"You think I'm making a mistake?"

"I am perfectly certain you will regret the step."

"But I tell you I'm sick of the drudgery and the . . .

temptation if you like. There's no *peace* in an office. These damned native races are at you, at you, at you!"

MacTaggart, noting the second thrice-repeated objurgation, touched his right eyebrow in thought.

"Well, cross that bridge when you come to it. The R. N. O.'s in Cairo to-night. He'll be back to-morrow. Go to the Continental to-night and dance with the nurses."

"Are you?"

"I? Of course. I like dancing. It is an excellent aid to reflection."

"I'm going to ask Mrs. Callisthenes."

"Why not? She's sweet on you. Anyone can see that."

"But look here, Mac, you see nothing wrong in—my wife's friend and so on? You said to-day you didn't know I was running a skirt. Do *you* run a skirt?"

"In what way?"

"You write a lot of rot about Coptic maidens and so forth——"

MacTaggart stood up, deep-eyed, a pair of vertical folds on each cheek. He was smiling, his bald forehead shining in the light of the lamp Stephan switched on.

"You remember that? Did I use that expression? I was thinking, only yesterday, you were the only man in the place besides myself who hadn't a mistress stowed away in one of those flats in town."

"Nothing extraordinary in that as I'm married."

"That's a very unsophisticated comment, Rumford. Why, even the respectable old Ranciulli has an Armenian family with a pretty daughter living at his expense in the Arab quarter. Captain Bannister would get a shock if . . . however, Mrs. Callisthenes is an extraordinarily fine woman. Do you know what I was thinking when you

spoke of Neirreddin Bey? I thought Mrs. Callisthenes had told you something. She used to be very *intime* there. At one time, I may tell you, we had our eye on Mrs. Callisthenes. But it was merely *une affaire*. Neirreddin told her nothing."

"And to you, being *intime*, as you call it, and having an *affaire*, is all in the day's work?" said Stephan. He stood with his feet apart, gazing down at the horrible blue-painted globes that were supposed to light the quay, tapping his teeth with the silver knob of his cane. MacTaggart smiled.

"Oh, as to that! A censor has neither blood nor entrails. An embodied abstraction; knowing everything he naturally knows nothing. You wouldn't ask if you had to read the letters of lovers and their wives, mistresses, daughters, and maiden aunts. One no longer has emotions of one's own. Yesterday one of my assistants showed me a letter from a man on a transport—we had to cut out a few sentences in which he told the family where his ship was and where she was bound—and at the end he put a postscript telling his mother that if she had that Annie Somebody coming round any more they could tell her he was getting married out here. Annie's letters to him are quite a study of feminine emotions. She's driving him into some other woman's arms by nagging him across three thousand miles of explosive sea water. He doesn't answer her at all. Another chap on the same ship has had a letter from a chum and he is trying to get permission to go home for a few hours. What for? Just to shoot another man who is after his wife. He'll probably get leave. You'll see him at Navy House some time. Another chap, a captain, has had a short note from someone calling himself Percy. Percy has taken the captain's wife

away "where you will never find her. We are going to the States as soon as my ship sails." Evidently Percy hasn't done anything very clever, because I've seen the captain in the bar downstairs standing drinks. And he has a girl in one of these houses."

"But you don't class Mrs. Callisthenes with these people, do you?" insisted Stephan.

"My dear fellow, no. I make no distinctions though, in the course of duty. There are only two kinds of women, Rumford, for each of us—our own women and other men's women. What is Mrs. Callisthenes to me? An alien whose letters are sometimes extremely difficult to decipher. Greek script is about the worst horror of the war. But most exemplary when deciphered. Colonel Callisthenes receives minute details of the health of the young Eleutherios. Also protestations of affection.

"Hokey-pokey, in fact," said Stephan.

"Precisely. As you say, hokey-pokey. So long as she doesn't communicate military, naval, or diplomatic information I don't care how many lies she tells her husband. But you'd better go down."

"You understand, of course, I'm entertaining her as a friend of my wife's," said Stephan, pulling at his lip.

"I'd entertain her off my own hook if I were you," said MacTaggart. "Mrs. Callisthenes doesn't look to me like a woman who would ever want to play gooseberry. Why, man, she admires you! Now's your chance to show her."

"Show her what?"

"Why, that you appreciate it. The other officers are rather afraid of her, I imagine."

"How do you know she admires me, as you call it?"

"Told me so in the most violently Platonic Greek and rounded it out in pretty non-Platonic French. She thinks you 'a man of great valour,' she told me."

Stephan turned his head so that he could see the whimsical smile on MacTaggart's face—whimsical but not derisive or mendacious.

"All depends on what she calls valour."

"Well, the Greeks have a pretty fair notion of the meaning of the word, my friend. You mustn't let your mind be warped by the Levantine duplicity and gerrymandering. This place was always a cesspool. Ancient Pelusium probably gave the Roman proconsuls as much pain as Port Said gives you. I dare say naval officers watching the local Copts begged to be put on a trireme again."

"I never know whether you are pulling my leg or not," said Stephan, preparing to descend.

"Well, what I was going to say was, a Roman naval officer, in Pelusium you know, would have called himself in luck if a handsome Greek lady had thought him 'a man of great valour'!"

Stephan went down. Somehow he felt better. He couldn't let MacTaggart, or anybody else, into the real trouble between himself and Ethel. Did the old Roman naval officers have *that* to contend with? he wondered. His grievance would be impossible to enunciate to an unmarried man or even a married man who had no experience of Ethel. *It was because he and Ethel were so much alike!* he shouted to himself, as though he had had a sudden revelation. It was like seeing suddenly the solution of an algebraic problem after staring at it, while pinching his lip furiously, in the examination room. He went on down, flung his cap on the hook, and

balanced his cane in a corner. The bar was full. Drink, drink, drink! Some of these men would be chronic soaks by the time the war was over. Gin-and-bitters, gin-and-vermouth, gin-and-ginger-beer, whisky-and-soda, whisky-and-lemon. Cocktails with humorous names, gut-rotting concoctions from the States. The bar roared all day long. Stephan turned into the dimly lit dining room, an abode of refinement compared with the room on the other side of the hallway. And he saw a round white arm raised in a beckoning salute.

The yellow lamp shade kept their faces in shadow. The tables near them were already vacated and Anastasia risked a smile of tender welcome, her eyes lingering to hold his own in a dizzy maze. He sat down, slowly opening the napkin and spreading it with deliberate care on his knees. He saw her return to her food with content.

"Am I late?" he said, looking at his wrist watch and back again to the menu held before him by the head waiter. He nodded: soup, fish, cutlet and peas, a piece of melon and coffee.

"I think you never come," she said smiling. She was in a black gown cut low, revealing the smooth pallor of shoulders and arms and the deep cleft in her bosom. He felt suddenly reckless, proud with a sense of possession.

"I have been busy," he said. She smiled, accepting the excuse without qualification. She was in a strong position. There were no other women to compete with her in Port Said. The wives of Levantine merchants and ship captains, nurses and café-chantant girls, for Anastasia Callisthenes did not exist. She had said to

MacTaggart in French, as they parted in the street not far from the Eastern Exchange, "I am very content!" with a dazzling smile that made him her champion in spite of his intellectual comprehension of her fundamentally piratical nature. And perhaps in his mind lay a faint cloud of malice born of Ethel's too ready acceptance of himself as a socially negligible man. She had been just too sharply aware of the social cleavages. . . .

Anastasia spoke in a low tone, but her eyes sang a song of triumph, with undertones of remembered ecstasies. Without remorse or regret, she faced the immediate passion of her life, a being of ineffable intimacies. She was one of those women whom a loveless maternity rejuvenates. She had the potentialities of youth with the experience of maturity. For her, love was an experiment in sensuous achievement. Lovers, for Anastasia, were temples of experimental adoration. Her fidelity, while it lasted, was absorbed and complete. She was in a trance of sensuous ravishment. At intervals she would pause and glance up at him again as though to assuage the burning passion of her heart.

"There is a dance—" he looked round and saw they were forgotten by the others in the dining room, "—at the Continental."

"You will take me? It will be all right? It will be delight' wis you."

The broken English intoxicated him strangely, like an exotic beverage. He had always had to take so much of Ethel's rhapsodies for granted. She was like a savage who can only count up to ten, and possesses but a score of words to express the emotions of his soul. And

Stephan had noticed, since the war, her accretion of swagger words in use a social step above Sefton Park. . . . Shut his eyes as he would, he'd noticed that.

"There'll be a lot of nurses, you know. Want us to dance with 'em."

"Yes? But after, you will dance wis me? And we look at ze sea wis ze moon. Me!—" she touched her bosom with one long finger sheathed with a polished filbert nail—"I 'ave such sweet thoughts. . . ."

Stephan shrank, in his soul, from the fierce onslaught of her eyes. How to manage this? The problem, as it presented itself, was not as he had visualized it. He glimpsed at this moment new and unexpected dangers —the inexorable demands of a woman in love, and the consequences of his failure to respond ceaselessly and forever to those demands. Strangely he thought now of the whimsical expression on MacTaggart's face, as though that *deus ex machina* had already sensed the inevitable complications of love.

He said: "So have I. Never had anything like it before."

He spoke hurriedly, unaccustomed to voice a fundamental hunger, yet with delight. Flickering at the back of his mind was the thought of Ethel flinging herself on the bed . . . then reaching down for her shoe, pinched and drawn at the mouth and eyes. It made him feel as though he were walking with Anastasia along the edge of a high precipice. Perhaps a whole segment of the road would give way and they would go over together. But he could not go back. Something inside told him he must go on. He saw Anastasia, as the waiter walked away with her plate, put her elbows on the table and smile at him.

"No?" she said sweetly. "For you it is first love?"

He bent his head, busy with his food, frightened at the meaning of her words. He did not want to express what he felt, even if he were able. He did not believe any words existed that would express exactly the tumult inside him. He did not answer. He had a vague but indestructible loyalty to Ethel. He would never permit her to be criticized. He did not want to analyze what he was doing because he knew at the bottom of his heart that he was sinning and that he would have to pay. He was one of those Englishmen who are capable of a sin but are unable to discuss or defend their motives. He hardly wanted to speak to Anastasia at all save to conceal his emotions, and to present to the world a surface of conventional friendship. If Stephan had ever heard of a man abandoning everything for a woman, he was quite incapable of understanding such a mentality. He had no materials out of which to create a figure of pure romance. He had accepted the pattern of his life, close-woven, without vivid colours or adventurous design, a pattern handed down from one generation to another of respectable men and plain high-bosomed women in a shipping parish. The war, the universal way of escape to self-expression, had appeared to him a continuation of his regular existence, with discipline and duty on either hand and an inarticulate patriotism somewhere in the background. It was Ethel who had absorbed the current cant of investing one's prejudices and antipathies with patriotic significance. But he, flung suddenly, by chance and the desires he had never suspected, into the strong current of passion, could only keep afloat. He could not talk. Port Said, the visible Orient, had beset him for a year or more and had culminated in

Anastasia; but it could not change his nature. Even under the sway of a passion he wished to escape from it, to commit no betrayal of the English code.

He said, "You want to know too much! You'll come to the dance?"

She only nodded, seeming to understand how impossible it was for him to match her words. He became more easy in his mind and gave her a momentary glance from under his brows that made her tremble and melt, it was so unexpected by both of them.

The servant in Turkish dress poured black coffee for them. Stephan suddenly ordered liqueurs, and the topaz-coloured glasses on the brass tray seemed to release a knot in his brain. He smiled as he held up the glass a moment and glanced at Anastasia. It was a symbol of their coming evening together. He was taking a lady to a dance. They sipped, and he lighted their cigarettes with careful abstraction. It was essential to him to feel in command of the situation. And she, as though by instinct, was aware that she could never do anything with him save as an oriental slave. She was aware that the security of her tenure lay in its contrast with what he had experienced with Ethel, the steady, relentless, this-is-for-your-own-good-dear, English bossing. And as she sat watching him through the cloud of smoke as he scribbled his name on his chit for the liqueurs, she seemed to know that tenure was brief as well as fragile.

"You are ver' tired," she said. "You work too hard, I sink."

"I'd take leave if I could get it. But not now. Not now."

"Oh, I would—" she breathed, gathering up her be-

longings and slowly rising. He finished his liqueur hastily and rose with her. "—I would leave zis place. And you would 'ave rest."

"Where could I have rest? Not while the war goes on," he said in a low tone as they went out. "I'll tell you something," he added. "I can't rest. Must be on the job." He saw Cassar and Mifsud rise from a table in the bar. "You going upstairs? I'll wait."

He turned to the two men almost with an expression of welcome. Love was not his *métier*. He experienced relief as it receded. It was, to him, a side dish, a savoury, of the banquet of life. The thought shot through his brain again, as he waited for Mr. Cassar to speak, that he must get on a ship, get on a ship, and feel the wind of the open sea on his face. All this heat and dust and dirtiness of Port Said behind him! Glad he would be to have known it all, suppling his brain and hardening his character; but he wanted to leave it behind. He saw himself in years to come, an austere commander, remembering his affair with a Greek girl in the Levant, a modern Nelson who had the sense to give it up!

"Yes?" he said crisply, smiling. "Any more news of your ship?"

"Yes, Mr. Rumford," said Cassar impressively. "The manager says he has received assistance on instructions from Port Said, and she will be loaded to-morrow morning."

"You're lucky. From what I understand of your charter, we help you as much as we can, but it's up to you to keep time. Well, we'll see."

"But, Mr. Rumford, you will allow my partner and myself to say we much appreciate . . . And we have

taken the liberty to make a leetle present for Mrs. Rumford. We have receive' it from Cairo."

"That's quite all right. Leave it in the office," he said hurriedly.

"We hope Mrs. Rumford is recover' from the bombardment," said Mr. Mifsud.

"She's gone to Cairo herself. She'll get it when she comes back. You'd better give it to her yourselves. I'll have nothing to do with it."

The old ring came into his voice, clear and masculine, and they gazed at him with large appealing brown eyes, full of a bovine cupidity. He took his cap and dismissed them with a wave of his hand.

Men passed him, staring, nodding or oblivious, chasing their own rainbows. He waited. As the door swung he saw a cab crawling and rushed out to call it, colliding with Captain Bannister in the darkness of the entry.

"Way 'nuff!" said the captain, holding him. "What are you trying to do?"

"Get a cab."

"Well, have a drink now you've got it. With me. I had dinner alone on board. We sail in the morning early, and I need society."

Stephan was enfolded in the big man's aura. Bannister was something familiar. He was Sefton Park without Ethel. He was a ship-master, and Stephan had no real knowledge of life beyond the range of a ship-master. Fundamentally, he thought of all other professions as "clerks and counterjumpers, parsons and bagmen," just as his father did. And Stephan knew old Bannister had been put out because of the Ranciulli matter. Old Bannister had been jarred by the arrest of his juniors. And bombs falling all round the *Cardigan-*

shire had made him realize. Stephan went into the bar.

"I'm taking Mrs. Callisthenes to the dance at the Continental," he said. "She's just gone up to see if her kid's all right. Have you got your crew?"

"No, thanks to you!" Captain Bannister towered over Stephan at a deserted end of the bar and opened his experienced pale eyes wide in humorous protest. "I shall be glad to be out of this dump, Rumford. It's too congested. Mentally, I mean. You've got too many bosses to take orders from. And they're all down on what they call 'the master of the vessel.' Here's one master of a vessel will be glad to get to sea. What do you say? Wouldn't you like to pull out? I wouldn't be in your shoes! We'll have a drop of Irish and plain water. It's a man's drink, Rumford."

He looked down benevolently and in a semi-abstraction, as though all this were merely a substitute for his real thoughts.

"I'll have an Irish for once," said Stephan. "What do you mean—pull out? I'd like to be on a ship, if that's what you're driving at. But you've a command. I've another twenty years in the Cunard, supposing I go back, before I get even a Mediterranean cargo ship. Do you see me climbing the forecastle-head for twenty years?"

"What are you doing now in that office? Holding everybody up. Ranciulli says his stores are late to every ship he serves. And you lock my men up!"

"You ought to complain to the R. N. O., not to me."

"Not I!" He drank his Irish down at a single gulp. "You and your R. N. O. and your R. N. T. O. and R. A. S. C. and R. G. O. and G. R. T. O.! If it isn't one it's another or all of 'em, barging their launches into my accommodation ladder with new orders You'd think

we didn't know how to discharge a cargo! Hey, who's making money out of that tug-boat business?"

"Ha!" said Stephan, one eye on the doorway.

"Ha! Is that all you've got to say? Seven pounds a day for that one-lung tug to take the lighters round to another transport. Why not lay me alongside of that transport?"

"You want to know more than is good for you," said Stephan. "That's nothing to do with me. That's the R. N. T. O. and the Captain of the Port. Also somebody in Cairo is a relative of the chap who owns the tug."

"Ah, the Captain of the Port!" said Captain Bannister. "He's a great naval genius, to judge from his regulations for anchoring."

"Why not go and see him?" said Stephan, finishing his Irish.

"I did, and he was not to be disturbed. From one to three-thirty. Siesta."

Stephan looked down. He knew the Captain of the Port was like that. Perhaps he'd been working late the night before. He smiled.

"And if that's not enough there's a madman from your office on my ship this afternoon."

"What?" said Stephan. "What?"

"That young Arab clerk of yours," said Bannister. "He came on board with the papers and asked the mate for a passage to Durban for himself and his wife."

"This afternoon? After the raid? I told him to give the papers to Lieutenant Rigby."

"Supper time. Sat in the mate's room and told a long yarn about changes in the office and he would be resigning and he thought of going to Durban. Plenty of his sort there, you know."

"I *don't* know! I had no idea he was doing that sort of thing. What did the mate say?"

"Told him to get permission from ashore."

"But how could he—he hasn't got a wife. At least his wife's in Alexandria. And she can't go with him. He's——"

"Very likely. He said something about family trouble."

"But you're sailing in the morning. He couldn't get passage even if he had been kicked out."

"Oh, he means next voyage. He was very upset. He looked half dotty to me when he came into my cabin."

"He's got delusions of grandeur," said Stephan. "And he got a fright this afternoon. He can't stand the bombs. Ran down the street like a rabbit! But his wife——"

"He says he can pay the passage. You know we have two spare cabins."

Anastasia came down and stood in the hall. Stephan turned. Captain Bannister touched his hat to her in an old-fashioned way.

"I'm going to play a game of pool at the Eastern Exchange," he said.

"You are sure he said his wife?" said Stephan. The captain nodded.

"Well, that's the last piece of news I expected to get from you."

"It is," said Captain Bannister with a slow wink. "I'll say good-bye to you now. And to you, ma'am. We go out early. See you next time in."

"We'll take you round."

"No, I can walk that far. Exercise. Go on, now. You'll

give my duty to Mrs. Rumford? I hear she's . . . Yes. Good-bye."

In the cab Stephan sank back and plunged into sudden thought. The notion of Mr. Yakoub . . . Ethel would at once say he had been "hounded." "You hound people." You couldn't help hounding Yakoub. He had a sheep-like consistency, a maddening resilient softness that made him a sort of natural sacrificial animal. And he had run down the street as if a butcher had been after him with a cleaver, when the bombs were dropping. Stephan glimpsed how the Turks, the Kurds and Croats, all those butcher-folk, felt about Armenians. . . . But Yakoub, with his London matriculation and his ambition to enter the R. N. V. R. sub-lieutenant, was a problem. And family trouble! Think of describing Elizabetta Italiana, in jail for transmitting enemy letters, as a family trouble! But Stephan had been in Egypt long enough to know Mr. Yakoub wasn't thinking of taking Elizabetta to Durban. Durban was full of Syrians and East Indians. And being British subjects they wanted votes! The South African whites were in for a time. No; he had some other woman.

Stephan became aware of Anastasia close, fragrant with her *Essence des Anges*, her lips pressed to his ear. He suddenly took her in his arms and turned a blind face of stone to her. In the intense darkness under the hood, swaying in the silent dust of the quay, where only a faint blue globe showed here and there in a doorway, they seemed to be traversing a secret subterranean passage from their familiar world to a misty blue void that was the Mediterranean Sea. For a moment he held her, staring past her toward the Canal while her body pressed hard against him and her round arms coiled

about his neck. His senses swam. What was this? Reward, or something for which he must pay? This sweet languor, this secret revelation of the flesh which had come to him unsought, how could he define it save as ancient witchery, thrilling all the fibres of his brain? And yet he kept that blind face of stone. As though he knew that she had no need of a silly, soft-eyed, gurgling lover, but an image to adore. He felt her hands exploring his face. He knew she was there, smiling that strange all-comprehending smile, into which he seemed to sink without reproach or shock, and then float softly. It passed through his mind that she made no demands for the future, content to savour the triumph of which, perhaps for months, she had dreamed. Yet it seemed unfair. His face became harder as he thought of Ethel, flung down on the bed, forlorn, somehow suddenly and evanescently common. What that American passenger, Mr. Premru, had called "a quitter." Because Stephan discovered in himself a feeling of incredulity at Ethel's lack of combativeness in the face of what he had done. Lack of perception, too. He felt he wished she had come out into the open and fought for what was hers. And then he remembered she was only aware of his antagonism and could not fight an abstraction.

"You will not dance too much wis ze nurses?" Anastasia breathed in his ear as she stroked his hair.

"No. But we mustn't be conspicuous," he said. "Later we can walk on the beach. Would you like that?"

"Wis you?" she murmured. The clipped matter-of-fact words he spoke were music to her. Their very strangeness made her shudder with delight. They were like a gentle flagellation upon her heart. They were transmuted for her into periods of divine harmony. The

timbre of his English voice awoke some ancient sorcery in her brain, and he was aware of it as they approached the shore, where the hotel stood like a dark bastille before the immense nebula of the sea. They held each other madly, panting for breath, as though being carried away together on the bosom of a rushing stream of desire.

As though it were a boat grounding on a rough beach, the wheels of the cab crackled on sharp shell gravel and pulled up before the hotel. The air was full of the sound of the surf and a warm moist wind. The great windows were painted blue to conceal the lights. It was like a seraglio set on the shore of a sultan's dominions. And faint strains of music came from a distant orchestra.

Stephan and Anastasia passed into a darkened entry and the cab rolled off up the Rue du Nil.

Stephan walked toward a group of men as Anastasia vanished into a ladies' room. He saw Rigby and some flying officers.

"Have a drink," said one of these, who came from Liverpool. He was an expert photographer. "We're celebrating."

"What?" asked Stephan crisply, "the *Ben-ma-chree?*"

"Oh, no. Swaffham's stunt. We've got an intercepted wireless which puts a better complexion on things. Swaffham and his squadron totally destroyed the junction at Homs and the Yards. Incidentally the whole Syrian quarter is in ruins. Swaff himself then went on to Damascus. He was brought down there, after he'd blown up a dump of ammunition. In fact that's what did for him. The explosion sent him into a nose-dive."

"But to go to Damascus in a sea-plane!"

"Swaff knew he'd never get back to the *Ben-ma-chree.* They had a lot of new batteries. So he went on and did all the damage he could. Here's to him."

Stephan drank. He felt wonderful as the news became clear and real to him. In the room beyond they were dancing.

"Who are you taking to this hop?" asked someone. "I hear your missus is——"

"Yes. I've got Mrs. Callisthenes."

"Second horse, eh? Well, don't forget these nurses from up the line want to be danced with."

Stephan turned to Rigby.

"Didn't Yakoub give you those *Cardiganshire* papers?"

Rigby shook his head. "He said you told him to take them on board. Why? Didn't he?"

"Yes, he did," said Stephan. "I was wondering. The captain was saying something——"

"I saw him this evening at one of those Arab places with that dark girl. I was going to the tailors about a new suit of drill. They were having dinner. You know the one I mean."

"Yes. You aren't the only one who saw him there. I'll write the orders in future. You will have to stay ashore a bit. How do you like the office?"

"Very well. Better than sweeping."

Stephan went on in to look round. The dance was not riotous. The shaded lights and darkened entries were a symbol of the psychic shadow that lay over the assembly. Young Englishmen in uniform and Levantine girls danced decorously under the eyes of superior officers who knew too much about the papas sitting back with corpulent mammas among the palms. The *Ben-ma-*

chree and the *Goeben* were shadows on the wall. The nurses from up the line and from the hospital across the Canal were in cliques that set up currents of distrust. Stephan, waiting for Anastasia near the door, saw a flight-lieutenant swing round close to him. He was dancing with a tall nurse with great eyes and golden hair. As they passed, the young man's lips began to move rapidly below a tiny eyebrow moustache. Stephan knew him and knew he was telling that nurse about him. He knew young Morris was the wit of the R. N. A. S. unit. Wrote scandalous little songs about the higher-ups and sang them at smokers to the strum of a guitar. Stephan saw Pretty Dick go by with one of the Ranciulli girls, ripe, black-eyed, with conspicuous black silken legs and scarlet-heeled pumps. Pretty Dick had a face like a sick conspirator. His handsome features were white as chalk, with black eyebrows and heavy circles under his eyes, and a sulky red mouth. Stephan contemplated him with dislike. He was the best-looking man in the place and the worst. His uniform was too well-fitting. Bond Street. The great seal ring on his finger and the platinum identification plate on his wrist were disgusting. Stephan turned away and saw Anastasia coming in.

As they danced, Stephan saw faces close to him that seemed antagonistic. Perhaps they were only curious or envious. Anastasia, living in the hotel with her little Eleutherios, had been an enigma, a problem for the young officers. They had kept away. Ethel had been friendly and had introduced her to many of them without result. Now Ethel was gone the atmosphere seemed charged with adventurous longings. Anastasia was ex-

traordinarily beautiful to-night. She seemed to have been undergoing a transformation. Suddenly she appeared before these crude Englishmen more desirable than ever before. A colonel attached to the R. N. A. S. asked for a dance. Stephan, dancing with a nurse, saw them disappear through the doors leading to the terrace. He tried to listen to the nurse. She was saying she preferred the Navy even if she wasn't a Wren. She was a cockney, and in her care to pronounce the word correctly she called it Neevy. He gave her a faint abstracted smile. The music stopped and he almost let her drop out of his arms. Several couples made for the terrace. Pretty Dick was trying to draw the Ranciulli wench that way and she was hanging back, shaking her head.

Stephan moved into the shadow of some palms and sat down. The colonel attached to R. N. A. S. was powerful. He held the balance between the army and navy. He was supposed to effect a coördination between them in flying. He was a director, at home, of a large engineering plant. He was a thick, middle-class business man, well aware of the nature of his position. He travelled on passes constantly between Port Said, Ismailia, Cairo, Alexandria, and rail-head out in the desert. His business at home had increased tenfold with war contracts. Stephan had heard he was worth fifty thousand a year. He would stroke his moustache and look a woman over as if she were a mare.

She did not reappear. Stephan was not sure of himself. You escort a girl to a dance and she is supposed to look to you for the common courtesies of life. But he couldn't rush into the darkness after her. She must return before he could go to her.

Yet he moved toward the terrace. Some power inside him drew him forward. He was about to ask a nurse to come with him when he thought: I need air. I can go out. This place is an oven. . . .

He passed through the doorway into a blue night that seemed to swim before his eyes. He was unable to formulate a plan of action. You cannot suddenly dash your fist against the jaw of a colonel worth fifty thousand a year, because of another woman, without knocking your career to pieces. Yet as he went out Stephan was in that mood. He found himself walking on the terrace. Below him the beach, the sea, the sky blended in a vague nothingness inhabited by blobs of white and the toylike forms of bathing huts. And suddenly Anastasia, her hair down and streaming, her face set like stone, swept past him, unseeing, toward the sea. Close behind puffed a dun figure with a clipped moustache, ejaculating, "Now, here, I say!"

Stephan put out a swift hand that caught the woman's shoulder and swung her to him. The warm wind blew her hair on his face.

"Here!" he said. "Here! What's all this, eh?"

For a moment she stared and then clung. The dun figure paused and peered.

"Who the hell are you?" it said, in a very affected tone, low and penetrating. "Go away!"

Stephan drove his fist in the man's face, a fat, satisfying plunge of bone on tissue. The man gave a faint whimper and put both hands to his face. "Oh!"

"Want any more?" said Stephan.

For some time after that he did not speak again. He held Anastasia's arm tightly, for she was in high heels and stumbled on the sand. They moved toward the break-

water where bath huts formed shelters from the west wind. Behind one he drew her and turned away while she composed herself.

He thought: What's going to happen now? The swine! It was her face as she passed made me do it. Outraged she was! Blind misery. The swine! What'll he do? He didn't really know who hit him. He can't make a fuss. He was—well, he was drunk, probably. Sober now, after that bang on the jaw. Soft, he was. Like hitting soft fruit. The swine!

Anastasia, on the sand, her arms above her head busy with her hair, suddenly stretched them toward him and he lifted her. She was breathing sharply still.

"Zat man, 'e sink I am café-chantant girl, yes! He tear my clo'es. He smell bad . . . too much w'isky. I say no! no! 'E 'old me, yes! yes! Ah! You come!"

"How was I to know?" he said in her ear. "He's a swine, of course, but I didn't know he knew you."

"Never! 'E look at me sometime' in ze hotel. I take no notis'. I am not café-chantant woman!"

"Well, I've done it now." He watched her deftly making good the torn bosom of her dress. He held her sweetly supple waist in his two hands and sought her lips. She melted close to him, her hair falling a little again so that she laughed and shook it out of her eyes.

"I 'ave no pins," she muttered ruefully. "I must go 'ome. My dress is finish'."

"You can't. They'll see you as you go in. What will they think? Can't you . . . the office?"

"You come?"

"No. I'm going in to see what that swine has got to say. Colonel Ringthorne it was. R. N. A. S. attached.

Here," he took the key from his ring. "I'll get you a cab. You can get in. The Arab's away to-night."

"But I shall be frighten' if you no come."

"In half an hour."

He found a carriage going away and whistled. He got in and drove back along the beach and she came to meet him. He lifted her into the dark vehicle, unwinding her arms gently from his neck.

"Custom House," he told the driver, who was old and who drove off without glancing at him again. And Stephan, drawing a deep breath, entered the hotel.

A group of men were sitting round a table, heads together. They all looked at Stephan as he advanced. One man slapped his knee and laughed. Stephan saw MacTaggart in the background, looking remarkably like a crow, in his civilian dress suit.

"You've missed a great sight," said the photographer. "What have you done with your lady friend?"

"She didn't feel well and has gone home," said Stephan. "What sight are you talking about?"

"Ringthorne fell down and hurt his face on the terrace," said one of the men.

"Did he hurt the terrace?" asked Stephan. The others looked at each other, smiling.

"Raw beefsteak seemed to be his greatest need. You ought to have seen him."

"I can manage without seeing him," muttered Stephan, sitting down and looking round for the waiter. "Perhaps he was drunk."

They looked at him curiously, knowing that he held the key to the extraordinary situation they had witnessed, when Colonel Ringthorne, attached to R. N. A. S., had stumbled through the astonished throngs of dancers

holding a handkerchief to a face distorted by a shattering blow on his mouth. They had seen him fall into a cab and roll away, and had wondered. They had seen him dancing with that Greek girl who lived in the Marina and who had come with the N. E. O. The circumspect silence of those who had been on the terrace at the time was conclusive to these sharp young men that somebody had given the man a hiding. There was an air of respectful horror in their attitude toward Stephan. They were like anarchists beholding the perpetrator of a satisfying piece of justice which might nevertheless react upon themselves later.

Stephan stood a round and rose. He knew they knew he was getting another stripe and that in some subtle way it was connected with the episode on the terrace. And this sense of being a man apart from their schoolboy cliques gave him pleasure. He caught MacTaggart's eye and gave him a glance of meaning.

"I've had a long day," he said. "Going to turn in." He saluted generally and went out.

"*And* the Croix de Guerre, they tell me," said the photographer. "Well, I wish *I* had a wife here to get me along with the admiral."

"Perhaps," said a pilot meditatively. "Perhaps he won't get that Croix de Guerre if Ringthorne's conscious in the morning. He's a vindictive hound."

"Oh, be yourself, Foster," snapped the photographer. "The lady is not entirely without protection. You know her husband's military attaché or something in London. Well, imagine the stink she can raise for our friend Ringthorne. And she's a very special friend of our friend's wife too. If I were Rumford, I wouldn't give a tinker's dam for Ringthorne. He reminds me of Hoggen-

heimer in *The Girl from Kay's*. You remember? The girl says: 'You mustn't do that!' And Hoggenheimer says, 'Why not? I'm rich!' That's Ringthorne, if you ask me. But he stopped a fast one to-night. Let's go in and give the nurses a treat."

VII

HE DID not take a cab, waving the first one away as it crept up and fell into step beside him. He wanted to walk. First the sandy wastes near the beach. Then there was the canteen, in tents, where Ethel used to go and work before she was in the office. The tents were full. Comic songs were grinding out of gramophones. Stephan saw three men dodge out of a tent flap and start off toward Arabtown, laughing.

He thought: I am going through with it. Can't turn back now. We've been through too much together. . . . That swine and his money! *Go away!* he said. Stephan imitated the fashionable whinny of Colonel Ringthorne's falsetto command. *Goo' weh!* Christ! I'd like to murder the bastard!

The thought of Anastasia being mauled made his head swim and red dots danced before his eyes. He remembered MacTaggart—only two kinds of women, your women and other men's women. Yes!

Too late now to start being righteous. There were obligations in this world you couldn't put into words or classify in dictionaries. None the less strong, though! Strong as iron bands. While it lasted, with a woman like this, you had a responsibility and a sensation of supreme happiness. You were more yourself than ever before! That was where it differed from . . . from the other, where you were struggling all the time in the grip of her personality, strong, sensible, and soul-destroying. Stephan remembered a joking remark of MacTaggart's, when he had been asked why he didn't marry. Mac had

said, to Stephan's scandalized stare, that he needed two women, one to sleep with and one to associate with. Stephan, as he approached the Eastern Exchange, wondered anew where MacTaggart got these original and fruitful ideas. Out of all those books? Stephan retained a faint wonder at a man who enjoyed reading. He himself, with his examination brain and sharp finite intelligence, was aware of regions of the spirit to which MacTaggart had access, without perceiving the bridge over which he had to travel.

Two women . . . one to . . . Was that the solution? Living in the midst of polygamy, Stephan had never realized its existence. It struck him dumb even in his thoughts. He shrank from the sinister implications. Those Arabs he saw every day were now even more repugnant to his sensibilities. No! Even MacTaggart's jocular suggestion was repugnant because Stephan's mind was fundamentally Sefton Park. Whatever he might do himself in no way altered the eternal verities on which England was built. You had to pay, that was all. And he was prepared to pay, when the time came. He even saw himself "making a clean breast of the whole business," as he phrased it, to Ethel. Better that by far than going in up to the neck in dirty philosophical evasions and excuses!

He passed the Eastern Exchange without haste. The tables were full. He saw the young Maltee Giovanni Marcù with the Merola family. With them was an alert red-head in a cheap linen suit. Stephan recognized Tom Payne. And then he saw Bek'ahri Bey, tall, cool, collected, coming through the hallway from the garden. Stephan waited. It gave him a curious pang of delight

to postpone his own arrival at his quarters. He would walk up the street with the chief of police.

"You are the man I want to see," said Bek'ahri Bey.

"I'm always the man you want to see," said Stephan drily. "Generally for trouble."

"Well, yes. But can you come to my office?"

"Of course. I didn't expect to see you at the Eastern."

"I went to see an officer who had trouble with a cab driver. Colonel Ringthorne."

"He seems to be having trouble all round."

Bek'ahri Bey made a significant gesture.

"The driver did not understand his orders. The driver called one of my men and the colonel acted in a very strange way. He had been fighting or had struck his face somehow. My man reported to me, and as it was an important officer I called to see him. He wanted me to dismiss my man for insolence, but he would say nothing about how he is like this."

"No, he wouldn't. It wouldn't pay him to. I saw the whole thing at the Continental. That wasn't why you wanted to see me?"

"Oh, no. In my office, please. In the town." He swung his arm toward the Rue d'Arsenal.

Stephan thought: The swine! Acted in a very strange way! *Goo' weh!* Stephan could hear that throaty class-conscious command even now. Probably he had succeeded in his tactics many a time.

"You saw the whole thing?" said the policeman.

"Yes. It was over a girl."

"Oh! I thought something like that."

"This place is rotten," said Stephan. "Too many officers."

"That is the truth!" Bek'ahri Bey replied with a sudden fierce energy. "Too many . . . officers!"

"And not enough for 'em to do."

Stephan, as he hurried along beside the tall Egyptian, thought: And I'm a hell of a fine specimen to say that! I'm one of them. I'm rotten, too, and beginning to look it. If I don't get on a ship I'll go the same way. Anchor dragging . . .

"You, Mr. Rumford, you understand that! You live a good life here, but for these others without wife and family, they get into too much trouble. It would be a good thing to have more officers here with wives."

"Would it?" Stephan gnawed his lip. "I'm not sure you're right. Much better clear them out and send 'em up the line. We could if the French——"

"Oh! The French . . ."

They turned into the darkened entry of the police station. Two figures rose from the bench where a policeman stood at attention.

Stephan followed Bek'ahri Bey into his office and turned, breathing deeply, his cap crushed against his side under his arm.

"Look here, if this isn't office business I don't want to have anything to do with it."

"Mr. Rumford, what could it be?"

"Those two out there"—he shook his finger at the door—"have some cock-and-bull yarn about my wife and I won't listen to a word of it. Understand? They've tried to get me to believe lies. And if they've come here——"

Bek'ahri Bey put up his hand. He took off his tarboosh and rubbed his head with a circular movement.

"This is office business," he said crisply. "I asked you

to come to hear for yourself. This girl came to me, much weeping, and gave me information. I told her to return and that your assistant must come with her. That was an order. She understands she is under surveillance, but we have orders to be careful with the native residents."

"All right. But you understand——"

"Nothing about your wife, nothing. Now you understand, Mr. Rumford, we cannot put in prison all these people. You wish to send them away. But to what place? And who will carry on the business of this port? And besides, the French. . . .!" He shrugged his shoulders and looked hard at Stephan.

"Damn the French," said Stephan.

Again Bek'ahri Bey shrugged as he turned to the door.

"That is just what you can never do in this country," he said quietly. "Here," he touched his breast, "the people are French. Here," he touched his forehead, "English perhaps. But they understand the French."

"That's more than I do," muttered Stephan.

He sat in the chair where Ernestine had sat before, in shadow, and watched her enter, followed by Mr. Yakoub, who carried in his hand a tarboosh. Stephan thought: He's revolted! That's what he's done. Going to Durban to make a fresh start. He's had enough of raids and—of me, too, I expect.

She stood, her white veil across her face and revealing the carmined lips and full throat through its transparency. She was desirable and sinister in her exotic costume of black and white, like a nun from some bizarre convent of worldly neophytes. Stephan imagined her a houri, a word that held for him vague implications of sensual dangers. Her black eyes swung round and

met his own in a challenge. She bore signs even now of exhaustion from grief, and Mr. Yakoub held timidly her arm in support.

Mr. Yakoub did not look at Stephan. He seated himself beside Ernestine without raising his eyes, keeping them upon the tarboosh on his knee. He did not look like a matriculate of London University. There was an expression of heaviness in his dark face like beaten bronze, and a beard was sprouting in two patches on his chin, a kind of black deposit. His shoes were twisted inward as he sat. He did not speak. On his arm he wore a brassard of crêpe. Stephan looked at this hard. His suspicions of what all this portended began to take shape in his mind.

Bek'ahri Bey began to speak. He said that, the R. N. O. being absent, he had asked Lieutenant Rumford to hear the statement of Madame Ernestine Mansur and Mr. George Yakoub.

Stephan stared at those two sitting side by side on the bench near the door, where the shaded light of the desk lamp made them seem vague and unsubstantial. To Stephan they were also forlorn, these two Syrians struggling in a vast invisible web of alien politics and hatreds. And then he heard the policeman mention Neirreddin Bey.

". . . came to the house of Madame Ernestine and while she was not present, found accidentally the notebook of Lieutenant Commander Swaffham, and read the contents. This took place several days before Madame Ernestine reported the finding of the notebook. She had informed Mr. Yakoub, but both were afraid to admit the possession of this information by Neirreddin Bey. Now

they wish to speak. Tell Lieutenant Rumford what you have heard from Ismailia," he said to Mr. Yakoub.

Keeping his eyes on the floor, Mr. Yakoub said in a low tone that an electrician, who worked for the Canal Company and who lived in the same house as himself, had told him that Turkish wireless picked up at Ismailia said all the Syrian quarter of Homs was destroyed by the British raid. Men, women, and children were all killed. No houses left standing. His own father and mother no doubt were among the dead. This girl's family also. . . . The city was burning. . . .

They sat perfectly still, shadowy and silent, like figures symbolical of that distant holocaust which had engulfed their native city. Stephan, his chin sunk on his breast, became aware of their significance. This couldn't go on, he said to himself. All the Syrians in Egypt would have this news in a day or two. They would never understand Homs was a Turkish military area, a railway junction and a storehouse of ammunition. All they would understand would be the destruction of one of their cities. He looked at Ernestine, she whose little Dimitri was now dead. And she had a husband in the Turkish army who would hear of it in due course. She sat motionless, staring at the wall. Neither of them regarded himself at all. They seemed to have been removed, by their immense misfortunes, beyond his range. To Stephan the expression on Mr. Yakoub's face was the result not only of the affair at Homs but of his own experiences in Port Said. Mr. Yakoub's face was that of a man who had been frightened into fatalism, which is a spurious fortitude.

Stephan looked at Bek'ahri Bey. "Well, what about it?" he said.

"The R. N. O. will have to give orders," said the policeman.

"You mean, Neirreddin Bey?" said Stephan and received a nod. The two figures on the bench stood up and turned to the door. Stephan said: "What's this about running away to South Africa?"

And Mr. Yakoub turned slowly, all of a piece, to answer.

"To-morrow, sir, I submit resignation, effective one month from date."

"You mean you want to go away with this friend of yours?"

"No, Mister Rumford. You misunderstand the situation. This friend of mine, like myself, 'ave lost all her family. She wish to go to new country. She cannot go by herself. I also wish new start, away from this war, which is not my business. The house of my father and mother is destroy'. My wife, who lef' me when I am in Alexandria, is in prison, for good reason perhaps. I do not wish to remain. I cannot go to my country. So I offer resignation effective one month from date, to accompany my friend to new place. But not what you think. Here . . ." he touched his breast and shook his head slowly.

"But you can't leave without permission," said Stephan sharply. Mr. Yakoub turned again.

"We apply for permission, stating special circumstances. I 'ave submit' to Bek'ahri Bey important statement which explain much trouble in Port Said and Canal area."

He turned to the door again and held it open for the girl to pass out. Stephan watched it close behind them

and stretched out his legs, laying his stick carefully across his knees.

"What's all this?" he asked. "What's he talking about?"

"It is in French," said Bek'ahri Bey, pointing to several sheets of typed foolscap on his desk.

"It ought to belong to me as it comes out of my office. That's our office paper."

Stephan pointed his stick at the sheets. Bek'ahri Bey shook a forefinger slightly.

"No," he said. "He claims he is a civil subject, having been refused a commission. And the subject is political."

"Give it to MacTaggart, then. He will translate it for me. Or is it something you don't want us to know about?"

"Mr. Rumford, there is nothing here you cannot know about. But that young man is frightened you will have him put in prison because of this woman. He knows she is under surveillance. But she is from Homs, like himself."

"Yes, that's all very fine. But I came here to get the goods on Neirreddin Bey and I haven't heard a word about him. He's the one we want locked up, not Yakoub."

Bek'ahri Bey held up his hand. "The locking up is not so easy, Mr. Rumford. We may be satisfied with something less. Neirreddin Bey, I have told you, is a very important man in this country. And that is because the Egyptian political people take his advice. But also Neirreddin Bey works with the French government. The French don't like this Homs business. They don't like an English railway to Palestine. Neirreddin Bey is a great friend of the French admiral. Both French free-

masons, you understand. Meetings in the bey's house on the Boulevard Champollion in Ismailia. And in the bey's house in Cairo for the French staff, because all public buildings are taken over by British headquarters. You understand? And Neirreddin Bey acts with great discretion. There is a French officer's *bloc* in Cairo, friends of Neirreddin Bey, who wish the French army and navy to lead in Egypt and Palestine. They wish to encourage the Nationalists here."

"And hamstring us," added Stephan. "So I suppose the contraband of war on the *Philarion* is for the Italians. Well, who are we fighting, the French or the Turks?"

"That is the trouble," said Bek'ahri Bey. "The political people here have strong sympathy for the Turkish national party. The Committee of Union and Progress, you know. The big people in Cairo want to stop the raids on Syria and Asia Minor."

"Do they, by God!"

"You see, Mr. Rumford, this is a matter of national politics. The war is something else. You cannot change national politics. This country was Turkish, and the sympathies of all the rich people are Turkish, like the Khedive. Neirreddin Bey and his friends know this and work with the French. Everybody understands that we must be careful with the important political people."

Bek'ahri Bey sat motionless, staring over the edge of his desk, as though he could see some of those political people seated on the bench by the door. Suddenly he spoke again.

"Neirreddin Bey has told the French that there will be no raids here if the Syrian ports are not bombarded. He heads the Syrians in this part of Egypt. And the French are in a difficulty. They wished the *Ben-ma-chree*

to go south to the Hedjaz. Now the English say there is a spy in Port Said who is protected by French interests."

"Well, that's the fact," said Stephan.

"They also say your office is interfering with French consignments."

"Then why don't they complain to the R. N. O.?"

"They do, Mr. Rumford. The R. N. O. is in Cairo now, to see the High Commissioner."

"It's a nice mess."

"It is the navy, Mr. Rumford, will not work with the politicals. The French understand the political situation here. The merchants are all together about this examination business. They want to make trouble. They want you to be . . ." Bek'ahri made a gesture of pressing something down with both hands.

"Well, you ask the French who we're at war with, them or the Turks. I'll see the R. N. O. when he comes back and we'll have the matter settled once for all. And I'm going to suggest the arrest and deportation of our friend Neirreddin Bey."

"It's a political matter, Mr. Rumford."

"It's a naval matter if he had any hand in the *Ben-machree*," said Stephan.

He thought: He's had his orders to tip me off. He had me here to show me Yakoub. And that Ernestine is probably shamming. The French! The French! What can you do with those bearded old babies? And a phrase of MacTaggart's came to him. Mac had been to Ismailia. "An impregnable bureaucracy," he called the resident French officialdom.

He got up and brought his stick down sharply.

"I told you what I think this afternoon. I wish I was out of it. I'm going home to bed." He remembered Anas-

tasia suddenly and stared at the floor, smiling a little. He repeated the phrase as though to himself: "Home, to bed."

Outside was the silence of a darkened town. Far away the cafés-chantants might roar and the Arab quarter seethe with drunken ratings. In the Rue el Tegara no light, no sound. Through darkness to the stars! The thought of himself, voyaging onward in the darkness that was his life, hovered in his brain as he saw a French naval officer turn out of the Rue du Nil. No, we can never understand *them*, he told himself. Nelson said: "Not to be trusted." And here was a Gyppy policeman telling the same story a hundred years later. Soldiers! A hundred centuries look down upon you to-day! And the little one-armed, one-eyed, one-idea'd flag-officer in the cocked hat had settled Napoleon's hash at the Nile. It was the only biography Stephan had ever read. The immortal spirit of that man had flashed upon him and set his own burning. He was the only man Stephan could understand as great. And the time he lost his arm when he swarmed up a rope one hand at Teneriffe, a cutlass in his teeth, leading his men to the boarding . . . Stephan remembered reading it and seeing the page blur before his eyes. When he was an apprentice. Silly young fool! Ah, but there was a man! We hadn't gone past him yet. "Not to be trusted." He had said it of these Frogs who were trying to hamstring everything we were doing. Afraid of nothing. Not even afraid to run a skirt either, come to that!

He let himself into the yard behind the Custom House. The place was dark save for a dim light in the main hall of the ground floor. The Arab, with his heavy knobbed club squatting at the door, rose up silently as Stephan

passed and sank back again when he recognized the officer who lived upstairs. Stephan ran up the steps quickly. He did not know what he might find. He did not care. As he reached the balcony he decided on his course.

He tried the door. It opened. He could smell the pungent perfume of Egyptian cigarettes. He passed through into the bedroom, and closing the shutters switched on a pink-shaded lamp by the dressing table. He thought: She's out there on the chaise-longue! I'm glad. I don't want her to come here at all. I want this to be nothing but what it is.

He stepped quietly about the room, in possession of himself. He had decided on his course. Swaff was gone. Ethel, sitting there in the train, staring as if turned to stone, was gone too. What was there to hold him back? He had a week's leave due. He would put in a submission to the R. N. O. for a week and, concurrently, to be transferred to active service afloat.

He took off his coat and flung his collar and tie in a corner. He went into the bathroom and bathed his face, passing a wet comb through his hair. He saw his face was white under the tan.

And then he went into the other room.

He saw the glow of her cigarette rise and fall as she sprang up and came toward him. He could see her face as he took hold of her arms and fended off her impulsive embrace.

"How are you now?" he asked.

"Quite all right!" she answered, remembering, as did he, one of Ethel's glib phrases. Anastasia laughed uncertainly. She wanted to take him in her arms, which were pinioned in his muscular grasp. He was pushing her

back toward the chaise-longue. He set her down on it and sat beside her.

"Can't have you here long," he said in her ear. The faint indirect glow from the pink-shaded lamp in the other room showed him the brilliant light in her black eyes. He held her possessively and she leaned to him.

"Not safe," he added.

"I do not care," she breathed thrillingly and pressed her lips to his ear.

"I do," he said. "What good would it do, to be found? I'll tell you: I'll get leave."

"Oh!" she sighed, understanding.

"And go to Alexandria. I'm going . . ." He paused. *No, that would be folly. Tell them nothing!* he shouted at himself. Let her find out, when he was already at sea. "I'm going to another office," he amended. "To-morrow you go to Alexandria by the six train. Take your trunks, kid, everything. Much cooler in Alexandria."

"When you come?"

"Soon as I get leave. For a week. No more."

"You want me to go away?"

"Yes," he said. "This is no good. I'm on the stretch all the time. Must see you, but . . . well, look at to-night! You must go. That Colonel Ringthorne, you know . . . I'll get you a pass to-morrow."

"And you will come?"

"Yes, I will come."

"Anozzer office in zis contree?"

"I don't know yet. I'll tell you later."

"I love you."

"Yes, I know. It looks that way, doesn't it?"

"In Alexandria we shall make life sweet!"

"Is life sweet anywhere?"

"Ah! when you speak like zat I know you have had unhappy life. I will make life sweet. I understand. . . ."

"Yes. Now you must go back to the hotel. Before the dance ends."

"Not yet."

"When then?"

" 'Alf an 'our I go."

He thought: They don't really think of us. They don't even think of the danger. She understands how to make life sweet. What does she mean by life? Not what I mean. Not what MacTaggart means when he said that about life divided by reason. It never gives an integer number. He said some German said it. Did he? That German would be able to check his figures on the western front if he was alive. What she means is pleasure. So we'll go to Alexandria. Why, it's no trouble, it's a pleasure! He laughed suddenly.

"What makes you laugh?" she demanded, stroking his hair.

"Thoughts," he said, pinching her chin. She caught his hand in her teeth.

"Tell me your thoughts," she said. She drew his head down on her breast, but he sat up. Could he tell her his thoughts? He was thinking how passion seemed to take the form of biting. MacTaggart had set him off on that once. Spoke of "eating the god," the Eucharist, and phrases like, "you look good enough to eat" among sailors speaking to their sweethearts. No connection, Stephan had said, scandalized. Yet they did want to bite the flesh.

"No," he said. "You want to know too much."

"Tell me," she said, and he said he would tell her in

Alexandria. "Here my thoughts are not my own. Tell me now: what did Neirreddin Bey do in Cairo?"

She pondered, giving a little laugh. "I don't want to sink about 'im any more."

"No, but I want to know. It is important."

" 'E buy newspapers for 'is partner, Mr. Constantin Savrigny. Zey 'ave all ze papers in Egyp' now: Greek, Arab, Italian, French, and two English newspapers."

"For Constantin Savrigny? Is he a Frenchman?" She made a derisive spluttering noise with her lips, and shrugged her shoulders. She put her round white arms about his neck and drew him down forcibly.

"When you come to Alexandria?" she whispered urgently.

"Next week," he said. "Tell me, who is this Constantin——?"

"French, yes. But I sink 'e 'ave Armenian muzzer. I feel it 'ere when 'e look at me." She took Stephan's hand and placed it on her left breast.

"Go on," he said. "Go on. What's he like, this Savrigny? Where does he live?"

"Alexandria. 'E 'ave big 'ouse at Ramleh. I went to a dance at that 'ouse. Madame Savrigny is Jewish, I expec'. Very rich."

"Well," said Stephan, "there you are! His partner, you say? All the newspapers in Egypt."

He wondered what MacTaggart would say. Perhaps he knew. Stephan was aware of these limitations of confidence. A censor has to know things. But to Stephan the news was important. He could visualize the power those men would hold to twist news in vernacular sheets against the British control. Vernacular newspaper offices

did all the native printing of handbills and circulars. Enormous power! Already the army had discovered printing presses and rooms full of thin, bad, dirty-white paper. The mufti, sitting among the workmen and the fellaheen of the Delta, would read out declamatory drivel about the Frankish wars in Europe in which the British were being destroyed. . . .

The news was important. And it had an extraordinary glamour coming from Anastasia. She was being of use to him. The supreme illusion encompassed him, the illusion that what a woman does for a man possesses some mystical value derived from her personality. He had a sudden, absurd yet intoxicating vision of Anastasia as an assistant, reading French and Greek documents for him, helping him, never suggesting "Better ask the R. N. O., dear." He put the idea away from him.

He said: "Time's up."

"No!" she murmured, holding him. He let her have her way for a moment while his mind swung forward. Alexandria, as she called it. A few days before he went on a ship. He ran over the ships: *Superb*, *Lord Nelson*, *Jupiter*, *Calliope*, *Grafton*, *Agamemnon* and *Rapacious*. Half a dozen sloops and monitors. To be on the bridge once more, with this experience behind him! His mind swung forward, but it also touched a new mark in growth. Part of the pain he was feeling was a pain of retarded development. His centre of gravity was changing.

"Time's up," he repeated. He took her in his arms. He was short but very strong. He lifted her up to carry her to the door. Her shoe fell with a click against the table.

"Ah, let me be wis you," she entreated, as he set her on her feet.

"That's what you would say," he told her, without displeasure. "Penny wise and pound silly. Suppose . . . eh? The hotel. I'm thinking of you. . . . Wait now."

He thought: and myself too! Have to get a carriage. They'll all be down at the Continental. But we can't sneak across the street. Drive round. Call at the Eastern for an ice-cream. That's the best way. He told her.

"I'll get one. Wait."

He went for his tunic and buttoned it as he went out. Port Said was a place where you met everybody fifty times a day. And you always met them when you didn't want to, or didn't expect them. Round corners. And if Anastasia walked into the Marina at this hour at least fourteen tongues would wag and nurses going on leave would tear the tale to tatters before they reached Malta. There were nurses in the Marina to-night. He looked up as he reached the street. What a morsel for the one-pip pin-heads who thought they were soldiers!

Stephan turned down the street toward the town. Audacity was the ticket. When a carriage drove across the Rue el Tegara he blew a thin sharp note with two fingers in his mouth. Presently it reappeared and drove toward him.

He thought: Sometimes it does happen . . . The carriage drew up and Stephan saw a man with a small moustache and a cap with a red band. The P. M.

"Take you anywhere?" said this man, leaning forward. "Just wanted to see who was about."

"No," said Stephan. "It's for a guest. Send him back, will you? To the Custom House. D'you mind?"

"Not at all. Glad to help you."

The provost marshal leaned back as Stephan signalled to the driver to return. He reflected that this was as good

as he could expect. He went back into the yard and called up. The watchman ignored him. Anastasia came down the stairs almost soundlessly. He saw her stand on the last step but one and open her arms. . . .

That was, he thought, as he stood beside her at the gate, what made him mad for her. She had gaiety. She never seemed to be thinking out a plan to make him seem small. She danced lightly on her toes as they waited. The carriage swung round the corner.

"We'll go down the front and back to the Eastern for an ice. Tell him," he said.

Half an hour later he helped her out in front of the Marina. As he said good-night another carriage came up and MacTaggart stepped out. He looked quizzically at Stephan as he drew forth his purse. In the dim light cast from the entry he was a strange lank shape in black and white. The gray tweed hat gave a cosmopolitan and sophisticated air to his long scholarly face.

"Well," he said in his own peculiarly suggestive and modulated English. "Are you going out into the night?" And he laughed.

Stephan laughed too, so that his friend looked at him as he strode off. Stephan, indeed, made a gesture of derision before MacTaggart's face, as though he had captured the key of the night. There was about him an air of unaccustomed freedom, as though he had broken bounds, had escaped from somewhere. He might, thought MacTaggart smiling, as he climbed the stairs, have been on his way anywhere, to an assignation or to death in the Canal.

But when MacTaggart reached his own balcony and looked down across the street he saw a light spring up

in Stephan's bedroom. Above the closed shutter he saw him, stripped to the skin, a towel over one shoulder, stepping strongly athwart the lighted floor to the bathroom, a man absorbed in the complexities of his own tormented spirit.

VIII

THERE had never been such a day for him since he came. From the moment he sprang from his bed and let the shower pour down upon him things had gone with snap and precision. And over his morning tea he had read Ethel's telegram from Cairo.

Have decided to return Cannot remain away just now expect me on train tonight Fondly

Ethel.

That meant, of course, she had come back to keep an eye on him and things at the office. Someone had tipped her off: Ringthorne, for instance, could have sent her a charming wire last night, a wire which would make her send just such a cautious signal as this. He said "All right" to himself, and drank his tea. He saw Mr. Tom Payne in the office bright and early. Mr. Payne was evidently one of these gluttons for being torpedoed! It was curious, Stephan reflected, how some men bore charmed lives. Nothing could touch them. There was himself for instance. He, Stephan, was like that. That time he had left the turret on the old battleship *Boadicea* on manœuvres and the starboard twelve-inch gun had blown her breech block out and killed seven men. Or yesterday during the raids. Charmed lives. He sipped his tea and watched Tom Payne's red poll bent over his freckled hand. Not still for a moment. Highstrung lad. Bet he was a beauty when he was a brass-bounder! Stephan suddenly called to him, "Come in and have a cup of tea!"

The way he plunged in, aggressive yet modest, looking round at the walls!

Have decided to return. . . .

The wire lay on the tray as Stephan poured a cup of tea for Tom Payne. He reflected that Anastasia would be seated in the train with Eleutherios beside her when Ethel's train rolled in. There was a devilish sport in that. If the train were late they would pass one another without knowing it. . . . *Cannot remain away.* Why not? he asked himself as he said "Sugar?" to Tom Payne. She wanted to forgive him, very likely. Now he came to think of it, it was a situation exactly suited to the managing, quietly authoritative Ethel. "I quite understand," she would say gently. "Poor dear fellow." Stephan almost ducked his head to avoid her hand reaching out to stroke his hair. And of course, he thought, with a sudden perspective of his life to come, that was the true wifely way of it. To bear and forbear. To forgive and have infinite patience. . . .

"You're here bright and early," he said to Tom Payne, who replied that he had no intention of letting the second mate bag this job. "He saw me talking to you and has a hunch I'm going to sea. Tried to pump me like anything yesterday. I told him I was after a working passage home, but he doesn't believe me. He was always trying to do me dirt with that skipper of ours."

"The Rock Scorpion? Tell me about him. How did he get his command?"

"Well, he's a British subject," said Tom Payne, smiling contemptuously, "and he's got a British master's certificate. And mind you, he's all right, barring his ways ashore. It's that blasted second mate! When we were plugged—in the forehold it was—he says to the old

man, 'Look as if we'd got a Jonah on board, Captain!' That was a poke at me having been on so many ships that were sunk. Well, he's no mascot. I nearly hit him over the head with an oar. He's one of the gentlemanly kind. Training-ship snob."

Tom Payne drank his tea and set down the cup. Stephan thought: Nothing matters if people dislike each other. They won't even leave one another alone! *Cannot remain away*, she wires. Why not? She wants to see what I'm up to. She wants to be in the office, running the show, or think she's running it.

He said: "Well, I'm a training-ship snob for all you know," and smiled. Tom Payne put up his hand.

"Not at all, begging your pardon. Quite the reverse. Our noble second officer thinks we're all his social inferiors. I asked him once, 'If you're so wonderful why the hell did you come on this packet?' He smiles in his patronizing way and says, 'I didn't know what she was like. But I can always say I never sailed with you.' Captain Portunato says to him——" Tom Payne looked round, put his hand to his mouth and . . .

"I understand," said Stephan, wincing at the forecastle phrasing. "I've heard the expression before. Well, I'll give you a note to the R. N. T. O. Go out and wait till I've finished dressing."

So the morning had gone, triumphantly for Stephan. A cool breeze sprang up for an hour. He sat at his desk, with Mr. Yakoub and Rigby ranged on either hand. Mr. Yakoub looked pale. He had a new dignity. How can a man become dignified out of fright? Yet he was. It seemed to Stephan that George Yakoub had realized he was not cut out for naval service. He had realized that he was in the wrong pew. Stephan did not make any allusion

to last night. After all, he thought, If I had word bombs had wiped out Sefton Park, I'd be sick too. Damned sick!

Cassar and Mifsud, like a music-hall team, bowing at the door. Stephan imagined them coming on the stage like that to sing a song. And in stiff white trousers on his short legs, a cane tapping his small black boots, Mr. Giovanni Marcù hovering behind them. A music-hall turn! Yet, when you came to think of it, these fellows were all right. They had guts. Stephan had a strange liking for that young man who had—say what you like—dominated his own court-martial. Good stuff in him. He would take hold. Stephan said:

"Think you can do it?"

"I know the job," said Mr. Marcù. "She was in the Khedivial Mail yard one time. She's old, but good job down below."

"That's the style," said Stephan. "Bring her back and we'll have another transport job for you. Don't swing any more champagne bottles."

The broad heavy face, redeemed by the intelligent gray eyes, responded with a flicker of an eyelash.

Rigby came in from Navy House.

"The chief's back," he said, dropping a roll of ship's papers on the desk. "Hell's going to pop over those trawlers."

Rigby's interest lay there. The French had a fleet of Japanese trawlers which had come ten thousand miles to assist in sweeping. Now, according to Rigby, after weeks of inaction, the French were going to shift them to Toulon. Rigby spoke with feeling.

"Well," said Stephan, "do you want to go sweeping again already?"

"It's a man's life," said Rigby. "You don't wear a collar, but you don't have to tell dago skippers what liars they are."

Stephan laughed shortly as he went on writing.

"It's a pleasure when you're used to it—like trawling," he said.

"The chief sent word he wants to see you," said Rigby. "When you have a chance, he said. No hurry."

"I want to see him too," Stephan replied, and looked up at a steamer's shrill whistle. He rose and stood at the door. The *Alceste* was anchoring in the fairway, opposite the seaplane base. A mangy-looking French gun was being bolted down on her poop. Lighters crowded with Arabs were already closing in on her. Giovanni Marcù stood on the quay beside an officer's long black trunk, his big head sunk between his broad shoulders. His white trousers looked like sharply tapering struts as he swung his cane. Cassar and Mifsud, tense with anxiety, stood near him. Stephan turned to Rigby.

"Go down and tell Mr. Cassar and Mr. Mifsud that if those Arabs take cigarettes on board I'll have 'em shot." He pointed to the lighters, where men sat smoking. Rigby went down. Stephan saw him with the two Maltese, who waved their arms.

Stephan thought: Who'd believe that men could need any such orders? You can smell the leaking tins over here. A strong searching nasty odour; but it suited Port Said, which was the home of all bad smells. The hot sun bred them in the stagnant basins of the harbour. The smell of the Arab houses and of their cooking blended with the smell of hot bilge and camel dung and the exhaust gases of petrol launches. The smell of animals on a transport would merge into the smell of

rotting fish and the Brown Windsor soap he used in his bath. Downstairs the smell of rats and decayed vegetables. Stephan suddenly hated the flatness of the land, the narrow dirtiness of the vistas, the harsh inhuman atmosphere, like a tropical jail, of the whole place. You were so used to it you forgot it until some unusually penetrating stink roused your whole mind to a blind hatred.

He returned to his desk and Mr. Yakoub handed him the *Alceste's* permit to depart made out in triplicate and ready for his signature. A blue-gowned boy with a gold embroidered cloth wrapped round his tarboosh brought in a small white package "For Madame Rumford." Stephan took it into the bedroom and laid it on the dressing table. He stood looking down at it, pinching his lips for a moment. Well, he thought, she'll find it when she comes in. It's nothing to do with me.

He saw Rigby steadying the office telescope against a stanchion of the balcony, watching the *Alceste*, "to see if the blighters are doing what they're told." He gave the glass to Stephan, who took a long look. A feather of steam from the after-winch cleared away to show him a familiar figure leaning on the rail. Farag. He was in Arab coolie rig, but he was unmistakably Farag. Now what? asked Stephan, frowning and pouting his lips. The Arab runner was leaning on the rail and talking down at somebody on the lighter.

"I'm going down to Bek'ahri's office," Stephan said handing back the glass. "Keep the deck."

Bek'ahri Bey shrugged his shoulders.

"I don't think we can interfere," he said. Stephan shook his finger at the policeman.

"He's not to be trusted on a ship full of petrol," he

said. "I'll take the responsibility if you won't. Take him off. Lock him up. Do what you like with him. I'd shoot him if I had my way."

Bek'ahri Bey shrugged again.

"Very good, Mr. Rumford. If you will . . ." he turned and spoke to a sergeant, who saluted. Stephan walked out and climbed to his own office. He breathed deeply once or twice. He thought: God! God! You can't *make* these people understand. Why . . . Well, he was going to be taken off. The R. N. O. would stand behind an order like that, wouldn't he? With hell about to pop over the French trawler situation?

Stephan sat down at his desk heavily as he thought of the R. N. O.'s face when he said, stonily, "Don't detain her." Meaning the *Philarion.* But he had gone off to Cairo at a tremendous lick—same train as Ethel, was it? —and there were going to be wigs on the green. But . . . Stephan had a strange sensation of falling through space as he imagined himself without the R. N. O.'s approval. Down, down . . . But that was nonsense. An extra stripe and the Croix de Guerre. What a trick for a man's mind to play on him, to imagine such a thing! Why he, Stephan, was one of the most hightly esteemed executive officers in Egypt. Ought to be, anyhow, if work and vigilance meant anything in war time.

He heard himself telling Rigby that an ounce of prevention was worth a ton of courts-martial after the event. Look at the *Cotopaxi!* Somebody shoving cordite cartridges into her steam passages!

How to take up this business of Constantin Savrigny? Was it his affair? The R. N. O. might jib at that. Delicate. Mention it at tea, if an opportunity . . .

The question was whether he would come to tea if

Ethel were away. It was the domestic atmosphere, Ethel being very much the chatelaine and hostess, which the chief seemed to relish. Sat with his hand under his cup to guard against tea stains on his white uniform. Afternoon tea at the vicarage. Well, it didn't matter. He knew the way. Stephan decided to send Yakoub over with his submission for a week's leave and later transfer to a ship.

The smooth working of the office made no difference to his decision. Hardened it, rather. He could say: It's running now, smooth as oil; everybody knows the work, understands what they can expect from it: the next man simply has to keep it running. His own impress!

He went over, in his mind, the system he had inaugurated, filing, cross-checking, and provisional local blacklist supplementary to the big one from home. There was the wrinkle he had invented for checking a neutral ship's course, and his plan of making them turn in inventories of all stores on board, out and home. Some of them had been caught with forty tons of cotton waste instead of the two or three bales they declared. Ha! he could see the chief engineer of one ship, a fat Dane, sweating in front of him now. Ethel would call it hounding them, eh. A little hounding did the swine good. He hadn't heard any hints from the R. N. O. about hounding!

Tom Payne came in. He was one of those simple elemental beings who always run up a staircase and in consequence cannot speak on arrival. He brought up at the door of Stephan's office, one hand taking off his green felt hat, rescued from the ship, the other extended palm downward, as though calming an infuriated populace. Stephan looked up.

"What's up?" he asked without raising his head. "Where'd you leave your breath?"

Tom Payne held his hat out toward the Mediterranean.

"H-have you s-seen?" he wheezed and coughed apologetically. He began again, in second wind. "What do you know about that? The ship's gone!"

"No! Is she floated?" Stephan got up. Tom Payne made a gesture of obscene negation.

"Har!" he exploded. "Floated my eye! Floated down to the bottom. The navy had her. Well, she's gone, unless she flew away. There was a big hole in her backside, I'm telling you. Now we'll be paid off up to the date of loss."

Stephan looked through the glass along the sighting of Tom Payne's lean freckled forefinger.

"You'll get your money then," he remarked.

"They can send it to my old mother," said Tom. "From one set of old women to my old woman. Jiminy, they might have kept the old packet afloat! Now Captain Portunato will get a lot of insurance. He filled the cabin with a harmonium, a gramophone, a sewing machine, and two valuable canaries, and he had three big cameras. All insured. Clothes he had by the trunkful. He has a thousand pounds in war savings certificates. And I have the clothes I stand up in and seventeen pound to come."

"What did the R. N. T. O. say?" asked Stephan.

"He said"—Tom Payne suddenly laughed like a hyena and as suddenly grew serious—"you were running the neutrals and I'd have to get an order from you for pay on the examination officer of paying-off port,

whatever that is. Genoa will do me!" He looked down his nose.

"All right, I'll leave typewritten instructions for you here. You can sit down and commit them to memory. Safer than carrying papers about. Do that?"

"I've got a good memory, if that's what you mean. Too good, the R. N. T. O. said. I reminded him there was twelve pound six overtime due from his office he wouldn't approve."

"What did he say?"

"Said he couldn't remember it. Said if he had a memory like mine he'd take a position as a freak in a show."

Stephan saw the bearded Elizabethan figure of Beecham handing out this sardonic refusal. "I suppose it was a long while ago," he said.

"Only eighteen months, when he was R. N. T. O. at Havre!" said Tom Payne in a slight dudgeon.

"Well, you can remember a page of typewritten orders," said Stephan. "I wish I were you, going to sea."

Tom Payne pulled down the skin below his left eye. "See any green?" he asked.

"Watch out in Genoa," warned Stephan. "It's full of Swiss who were Germans not so long ago. Leave the girls alone. Especially Austrians."

Tom Payne looked down his nose.

On second thought Stephan decided to go to Navy House himself. He took the launch and directed Hassan to circle the *Alceste*. She was wreathed in clouds of steam from the winches.

"My godmother!" he muttered. "Cassar and Mifsud

are paying seventeen pounds a ton for coal and look at the leaks! Marcù ought to get after those winches."

He saw a large pile of ammunition cases on the poop. Arabs were lowering them down a booby-hatch below the gun. That's the French notion of economy, Stephan thought. Load enough shell for a year and condemn it six months later because it's out of condition! She ought to be safe from submarines if the gunners can hit anything. Which they probably can't.

He went straight into the R. N. O.'s office. Subdued activity. Writers and paymasters hurrying in and out. A marine told him Patsy Coombes was coming to Port Said in the *Rapacious*.

"What! Through all these mines?" said Stephan. "Who told you that one?" He reflected that marines seemed to know everything, and what was worse, spread it abroad. The *Rapacious* cost nine million pounds, but those were astronomical figures to a marine. He never grasped them.

The R. N. O. nodded. Twice his glance, dark from lack of sleep, flickered toward Stephan's face before he looked steadily at him. He laid the submissions aside for the moment.

"About that chap Yakoub," he said. "Can you manage without him? There's a fellow here has just passed in Arabic."

Stephan, with a moment's thought of how much Arabic this paragon among paymasters would be able to speak, said, "Yes, sir," and waited.

"We can't do anything with the French about the civil population here," went on the R. N. O. "So we shall have to exclude them from official positions entirely."

"Yes, sir. Do you know about Neirreddin Bey?"

"I know a lot about him. As for instance?"

"Constantin Savrigny," said Stephan, "now owns all the vernacular French, Greek, Italian, Maltese, and Cypriote papers in Egypt. Neirreddin Bey is his partner in the combine."

"Yes?" The R. N. O. took up a ruler and sighted along it. "Well, that's Cairo. We can't do anything."

"It connects, sir. Neirreddin Bey was with that woman we had the other night."

"We're deporting her too," said the R. N. O. drily. "Get rid of the two of them."

Stephan, staring, said "Yes, sir." He was beginning to understand. He wondered if Bek'ahri Bey was in this too. And he wondered what the R. N. O. would say if he were to remark crassly that they were catching the sprats and letting the whale go free.

The R. N. O. took up the submissions. "Of course," he said to the one about a week's leave. "When you feel you can. . . ." He read the other paper requesting transfer to sea service, and frowned. For a moment he did not speak. He looked down at the floor beside his desk. It was a way he had.

"I was going to suggest it," he said. "The office is organized. Change will do you good. What about . . . what about . . .?"

"Mrs. Rumford wouldn't go home, sir. She could remain for the present."

"I see. Well, leave it a day. Quite sure you want to? Have your leave, anyhow."

"One other thing, sir. I ordered a suspicious character off the petrol ship. That runner I caught—Farag. The

Philarion. I took the responsibility. He ought to be deported too, but——"

"In time," said the R. N. O. "You took him off?"

"Yes, sir. Or the police did at my suggestion. He was one of the crowd of Arabs shifting the cases for R. N. A. S. base here. A dangerous character, if I may say so. You never know what they're smuggling under those gowns. The *Cotopaxi*——"

"Are the hatches open?"

"Forward, sir. But the ventilators have to be left with the cowls on for petrol. I've warned Cassar and Mifsud about smoking and naked lights."

"She oughtn't to be there in the Canal at all, of course. But the port's so crowded."

As he went out into the sunlight Stephan remembered that the chief had made no allusion to his leave coming later, when Ethel would probably be back in the office. It was jolly decent of him. You'd think he had sensed some temporary strain. . . .

Stephan got into his launch, the engine sputtered and he went away in a long sweeping curve. Yes, it was a strain, but he wasn't sure it was temporary. Who could keep on like this? *Quite impossible, dear!* Why, all this bother and danger ought to bring them together closer, closer, and the happiness of the future could be born out of the peril of the present! Trouble was, she wasn't that kind. She was Sefton Park in bodily shape. He saw it plainly now because Anastasia was something else in bodily shape: light and form and colour, romance and immortal love. But was any woman that kind? Was any woman what you thought she ought to be or what you thought she was before marriage? You had to take nine tenths of what a woman was on trust. The hint, the

promise of felicity, was like the beauty of dawn at sea —gone in no time, to make way for a hard practical illumination. The glamour was gone. And a man had in his breast a curious small pain, a blend of indignation and injustice and self-pity, like a barbed hook tearing at his heart.

As he steered parallel with the *Alceste* he thought of the evening now approaching and the pain increased. He was not afraid, but he wished she were not coming back. He wanted to be alone for a few days. He would tell her the truth if it came to that; or rather confess it, as she seemed to suspect something. How else could he explain this sudden return? She wanted to take charge of his soul, shrive it, forgive, and assume command. And he most assuredly did not want that. He wanted to remain in command himself even if he never reached Snug Harbour, Sefton Park, Lancashire, England. He would rather steer straight ahead as he was doing now, out past the De Lesseps statue, out beyond the breakwater, out to sea until this damned hole of Port Said was not even a smudge on the horizon. . . . What would they say, he wondered, if he did that? He swung the launch in toward the quay. They would put him on a hospital ship and send him home as a case of nervous prostration. They got rid of all the nuts that way. Nervous breakdown.

"Way' nuff," he said to Hassan, and stepped ashore for lunch.

In the Marina bar he saw a group of men look up and, as he passed into the dining room, bring their heads suddenly together over the round iron table. R. N. R. men from an auxiliary ship. He knew they were discussing him. From his seat, as he opened his

napkin, he saw one of them lean backward to glimpse him again. That, he thought, was one of the things he could do without. Life in Port Said was ingrowing. Men in uniforms, unless they were in action, were like a lot of backbiting old women. Stephan scowled suddenly at his plate as he thought of the tales about himself circulating in gun rooms and around cabin tables on transports. And the small fry of the navy had been confused by the importance of his job, which most of them had never heard of in peace time. So, when he suddenly vanished, they would say he had been kicked out.

He thought: And whatever they say won't be a patch on the reality. That's mine anyhow. Even the chief won't know it all. How could he?

He looked up at MacTaggart, in a fresh brown linen suit, looking very cool.

"Lunch with you?" he said, sitting down opposite. Stephan said: "Of course. I'm alone to-day, you know. The wife's coming back, though. She's arriving this evening. Wired me she'd chucked the idea of leave."

MacTaggart made no sign of appreciating this as he studied the menu.

"I've had a call from a man who wants to meet you," he said.

"Then he wants something and I won't do it," said Stephan vivaciously.

"Yes, he wants something; but not now. After the war."

"Oh, after the war! Has he heard when that will be? You aren't kidding me, are you? Because I've had all I want of these people with their suggestions. They come up to my office with all sorts of schemes. It generally means a percentage for me if I wink at a swindle. Well,

I'm not going to wink at swindles. I'm going to sea on a ship and I hope she never puts into Port Said as long as I sail with her."

He said this in a low monotonous voice which only just reached MacTaggart's ears. He said it as though soliloquizing. The censor made no reply for a moment. When he had finished two radishes and a piece of pickled herring, he took up a stalk of celery and dusted it with salt.

"Now the sermon is over, I may tell you this is not quite the same thing," he remarked. The celery was tough. "It is a serious business proposal."

"They're always that," said Stephan.

"In which I am invited to participate as well as you," added MacTaggart and took another bite of his celery.

"Really? Well, I'd go bail for you, old man. What's the proposal?"

"Importing from Alexandria. You know it's a free port. It's a man named Ganón."

"What is he?"

"Oh, a Jew. They are the best people here, you know. They have a business tradition resembling ours, anyhow. The Greeks and Armenians are in a different pew."

"Different synagogue, if you ask me," muttered Stephan. "Go on, old man."

"Ganón used to be a money-changer. They all seem to begin that way. There must be a large profit in exchange. When the war started he had a vegetable concession from the Army of Occupation. He received what he thought was an extraordinary offer from the Khedivial Cold Storage, and he sold out. That left him with a lot of money and nothing to do but watch the Khedivial Company make several million piastres out of his conces-

sion. He has been in touch with me for some time. He asked me if I thought you would consider a business offer after the war."

"And what did you tell him?" asked Stephan.

"I said I'd lay the matter before you," said MacTaggart, with a quirk of his eyebrow.

"Where is he?" asked Stephan.

"Just behind you. Lunching with his wife. Over against the wall by the door. Wait a bit before you look at her. She's rather striking."

Stephan did not look round. He was not thinking of Madame Ganón. He was thinking of himself and Anastasia. His mind had a trick of suddenly building up fantastical pictures in which he occupied a splendid stage. First there was something shadowy and chaotic —end of the war. It was like music in his brain. A big blond tenor on a platform was singing somewhere in the past:

"Oh, girls, happy you will be
When your soldier lads you see!"

Stephan saw his chest inflating under the crackling dress-shirt, heard the vibrating roar of his voice:

"When the boys come home once more!"

Something like that, and the C. I. V.'s in their wide-brimmed hats, looking out of train windows, while the people cheered. Then he saw Ethel in Sefton Park, with her people. Himself he saw crossing from Dover to Calais, with MacTaggart; Paris, Brindisi, a fast steamer to Port Said. Train to Alexandria, where he would find Anastasia at the station. He would pinch her cheek.

Then he saw an office in the Rue Chérif Pasha, with American furniture, oriental carpets. A ground-glass door with his name in small black block letters on the glass above the knob. The word below, in smaller italics, was "Manager" of Ganón & Company, Importers.

Why not? He frowned at the food on his plate. Must get this straightened out in his mind. MacTaggart did not talk for the sake of it. Rather striking! Madame Ganón would get on with Anastasia. But then the end of the war was years away from the present showing. Which made the whole thing glorious. You could plan it out to the uttermost detail, if you had capital. Ganón had capital. Now then . . .

"Look here," he said suddenly. "What this may be, I haven't the slightest idea. But if there's anything in it, it has to be absolutely confidential. Not even my—my wife, you understand."

"Oh, absolutely! That's part of Ganón's conditions. He has to get options and make contracts with people at home."

Stephan looked up quickly.

"He isn't making contracts with the enemy for after-war business, is he?"

"Oh, no."

"Well, a lot of them are," retorted Stephan, and put his head down. He raised it again for a moment. "Not even waiting for the end of the war. I can show you."

"Well, don't you!" said MacTaggart, smiling.

"What do you mean?" demanded Stephan. MacTaggart went on smiling.

"You nearly killed a British colonel last night," he remarked.

"Well, haven't you ever wanted to kill a British colonel?" said Stephan.

"Yes, often; but what I was meaning to say—this scheme of yours; it won't work."

Stephan clashed his knife and fork together and drank down his mineral water.

"What are you talking about?" he asked.

"You know perfectly well what I'm talking about. I say it won't work."

"But Ganón's scheme will work, eh? What's it matter to you what I do?"

"Oh, very much! Do you think I'm going into this with Ganón, and you, if you are all tangled up with a woman? . . . Have it your own way!"

"Don't worry about me."

"You'll see Ganón?"

"Why not? I've had the idea myself often. Think I want to plough the Atlantic all my life? I'd be sixty before I got a command. Seven hundred a year!"

"Shall I bring him up?"

"Of course. But not tea time. The chief comes in then sometimes. Say between five and six. I've to go to the station—to meet my wife."

He thought: Always I call her my wife when I can't face it! Well, who cares? We'll have it out to-night. All cards on the table! Hers and mine. See where we stand. She hasn't been frank. . . . He says the scheme won't work! He thinks it a scheme, the damned Scotchman! You don't live on a scheme. It's your loins and your heart and your brain having a free-for-all inside you. What do you want? You don't know. You say you do, but you don't know a damned . . .

". . . . to meet my wife," he said again as though MacTaggart had made some remark about it.

They waved away the insipid dessert and rose. Stephan, as he made for the door, looked down upon a man whose big fleshy promontory of a nose sprang from a thick curling mass of hair. His immense rounded form humped like a caricature over his food. Opposite, against the biscuit-coloured wall, there was a woman whose eyes, with high thin-arched brows, were alert like those of a brand-new female mummy case in Cairo Museum. She was exactly like them. A necklace, of flat jade rhombuses, had come from the tombs. Her dark hair seemed to be carved from a block of obsidian. She sat straight, almost against the wall, so that she seemed two-dimensional. Her lips had the symmetrical Egyptian candour, sharply painted in dark red. As Stephan glanced at her she did not move. Her bright shadowless gaze saw him and did not see him. Great stones blazed from her fingers as they crumbled her bread. As she sat there, faintly smiling, she seemed as old as the land, and as wise. It was as though she were aware of all things and knew their ultimate futility.

Outside, Stephan waited while MacTaggart spoke to Mr. Ganón, who raised smoked glasses like disks of polished agate. He had, Stephan noticed, large red lips that seemed extraordinarily mobile in that black curling beard.

"What's she supposed to be?" he asked, outside. "One of your Coptic maidens?"

"I said she was striking. Oh no, she's a Thracian, I suppose, if you go back far enough, with more than a dash of good old Kurdish blood. Educated in Paris

too. You see, Ganón is a Roumanian Jew and she's from Bulgaria. A Latin Slav, they would call her in the text books of ethnography. Is that Greek to you?"

"Thought she was a Coptic maiden."

"Did you? That phrase seems to have stuck in your memory. Mrs. Ganón is very clever. She knows nine languages and speaks them really well."

"She's an enemy alien, then."

"No. She takes her husband's nationality. He's a British subject, naturalized."

Stephan yawned suddenly. "As you say, striking," he said. "Well, the war is still raging. Come up about five-thirty. . . ."

As he went upstairs to his office again, Stephan thought: He's nobody's fool, Mac. He is just the type to spot a good thing!

The double meaning of his own phrase made him grimace. He thought: What! Old Mac, with his Coptic maidens. No! All the same, *you can't tell!* I should think she *is* striking! Good Lord, those eyes! Ganón has money, all right. She's got a thousand pounds on each finger. And where did he wangle that necklace? He's been robbing the museums!

As he entered his quarters he threw his cap down and began to think of MacTaggart's allusion to Anastasia. He had said it wouldn't work. As if he, Stephan, were making an elaborate plan! For the first time in his conscious adult life he was living from moment to moment! He had for the first time abandoned the money-in-the-bank, save-it-for-a-rainy-day philosophy, in which he had been bred. Sefton Park deposited its emotions in a savings bank and often did not draw out the interest.

A certificate was all Sefton Park had—a marriage certificate, if you like. They did not spend. To spend was wicked.

He thought: Those eyes! After the war he would see those eyes often. He and Anastasia would be under their brilliant scrutiny. That woman, sitting there as though she were waiting for the millions to be slain, for the nations of the north to destroy each other, before she came into her inheritance of war-bred wealth, was symbolical of the world into which he would enter if this scheme went through. She contrasted in his mind with the muggy English provincial business life, with the narrow discipline of the ships and the semi-detached domesticity of Sefton Park.

He wandered into the bedroom, frowning and pouting his lips. What was a man to do? He saw the familiar emblems of his marriage. There was a faint perfume from the wardrobe of cheap veneered wood they had got from Simon Artz's store. On a sudden impulse he opened it. Ethel! She was there in every fold of the "good" English lingerie, the long stockings, the green cardboard box of handkerchiefs. Some queer streak of economy and puritanism kept Ethel from imitating Anastasia in underwear. Perhaps it was character. She had a tenacious hold on the essentials of English life. She had strength. Yesterday afternoon had been no fair test. She had been all abroad. Now she was coming back to take charge of him.

He stood looking at her clothes in which he alone had ever seen her and felt his inside wrenched with pity for her as she had lain on the bed, her shoulders shaking. Because she had found out about him. He had been a cad. A woman can always make a man feel a cad. He felt

now that she was right in coming back. It was everything in the world to her—her possession of himself.

But he thought: To-night she's coming. I can't have that. Later, when she's answered my fair question, perhaps. She's only got herself to blame. But suppose she . . .

He closed the wardrobe door. That was a thought. If that was the case he would be really a cad. He breathed more freely as he remembered how Anastasia's train pulled out a minute or two later. He would leave her before the Cairo train came in. He did not wish to be a cad. What he wanted was a wife, not a boss. By God, she's got to give up being a boss! He stood, his hands in his pockets, staring at the faint powder marks on the rug by the dressing table. He was going to hold the reins, wear the trousers, command the ship. That patient, silent setting aside of his own wishes had to stop! By God! He stood staring at the floor, the blood suffusing his eyes and making everything swim, as though he were fighting for his very life against a superior will. Not a cad! But if she interfered . . .

He sat down and leaned his head on his hand. The thought came to him that in theory she was right—we couldn't consult our own desires entirely during the war. We owed allegiance. Ah, but he couldn't blind himself to the fact that she was funking it. As though some women didn't have babies on the road as they evacuated their villages! With only an old sack held up in front to hide them from the other refugees. She had stood him off until he had turned to someone else, until she had forgotten what a man wanted.

He turned on his seat as though trying to find a way out of a trap. Well, she was coming back, to play the

same old game. Did other men suffer this agony? Did that man Ganón, with that startling woman? Why was he, Stephan, who was supposed to be so damned lucky, to have this everlasting problem of conflicting wills tearing at his inside? He had given in! He had been fair and reasonable. And she had taken all he had as though it were nothing. Was it the war? Was it Port Said? Or was it just that he hadn't got it in him to trot tamely in the shafts while she flicked the whip and held the reins?

He didn't know. He didn't know that this mood of a ravening injustice was the prelude to submission. All he knew was that he could not go to meet Ethel, after putting Anastasia on the train, unless he made her welcome. She couldn't be met with sulks. Let her find out all she could, let her do her damnedest, but he had to behave like a gentleman.

He thought: An officer has had a mistress before to-day, and his wife has found it out. And he has been straight about it.

And as for Ganón & Company, Importers, that would be there anyway. He drew his hands slowly up his thighs and then held the backs of them before his face. Live for to-day, he said, forming the words with his lips, as though he wanted to know how they sounded. But you could live for to-day with honour, he reflected. Which was exactly what the Pretty Dicks and Colonel Ringthornes forgot. He had forgotten it himself, come to that. He would be unable to get back to his own standard unless he had it out with Ethel. Couldn't life be glorious unless a man did the wrong thing?

Suddenly he had a flash of insight. He stood up and faced the door, which led to his work. Women, he thought, and he saw the bright shadowless glance of Madame

Ganón, had no imagination to help them see what was in a man's mind. He thought now of Anastasia, whose only idea was "to make life sweet." No, he thought as he dived straight toward his desk, there wasn't one who saw what a man saw. It was habit or luck if a man and his wife were happy. A man, he thought, had to do it. It was his responsibility to steer the ship into safe waters. Then he couldn't abdicate. He couldn't take French leave and he couldn't let the woman take command either.

Then where was he?

With a sudden effort of will he turned his mind to the desk in front of him. Rigby sat at Ethel's desk, solid, dependable, sweaty and safe! Fine chief officer Rigby would be. He might do well here, thought Stephan, when I go to sea. He'll think I'm cracked!

Stephan was surprised to realize he still wanted to go to sea. He would tell Ethel at once. She might not like it, but it didn't happen to be her business. He would make that clear.

On the pad lay a carbon copy of the instructions sent to the *Alceste*. Precautions against fire. Also a formal protest, merely an official washing of hands, from Bek'ahri Bey relative to the arrest of Farag and deportation to the Arab Quarter. Where he probably remained about three minutes, reflected Stephan. *The master of the vessel will be held responsible for all violations of the rule against smoking on deck or in the holds. This applies to all hands at sea or in harbour.* That was explicit enough. If it wasn't, Yakoub had translated it into Greek and Arabic. He had been told to pitch it in strong; frighten the beggars. Just giving the order and sticking up notices was no good. *A fine of fifty pounds will be imposed for every infraction of this regulation.*

Stephan recalled old Bannister's deep growl over this: "All very fine! But have you thought of the captain's wife and family?" Stephan had said that was the captain's job. You could never get a man like Bannister to see any other point of view but his own. He was a tremendous supporter of the I. M. G., that trade union of ship captains and officers which was giving all the third mates at sea enlarged egos. Old Bannister never got it into his handsome old head that a shipmaster was under naval discipline in a war. "Oh, that's all very fine," he would boom. Everything was all very fine so long as the captain's pay, prerogative, ease, comfort, and peacetime importance were left as old Bannister and the I. M. G. thought they ought to be. The Bannisters had always been humorously patronizing of "you young sailors" who had been in the R. N. R. for years. Now the Bannisters wanted the same rights as naval officers but were too stiff necked to take orders.

The thoughts ran on through his mind as he worked at his desk. Lines of Arabs filed in and out. Bluejackets, cap in hand, brought messages and clopped away in their heavy shoes. And then, without looking up, Stephan knew the chief had entered. He stood looking over his shoulder at the *Alceste* as though he were appreciating for the first time the folly of having a ship like that in the fairway. He could remember the time, when his ship was stationed at Gib., they wouldn't allow a motor boat using petrol to come within a hundred fathom of a warship. The laundry had been late because of that rule. But this was a ship full of the stuff. He thought Ringthorne could have had her put nearer the seaplane base. Or could he? The hospital people would kick. The Canal people would kick. So would the Transport people who

would have to shift all those ships. The R. N. O. decided that with the harbour jammed with ships, and the French not easy to move in Canal matters, nothing could be done. It was their affair really. He came in, nodded, and walked into the reception room where the Arab was clinking the teacups as he set them out on the bamboo table. Stephan rose and then sat down to finish the work he was on. He knew the chief detested flustered subordinates. He liked to move about unattended by stage fright. And it gave Stephan a warm glow to have him wander in and stand looking at a photograph of Ethel in the far corner—one taken last year. It showed her looking over her shoulder, a broad-brimmed hat shading her eyes and making them look extraordinarily deep. It gave him a glow to get up presently and saunter in, leaving the others at work, and speak casually of some theme. But Ethel had always been there before to pour out and hand. The chief had taken a cup and was drinking it. He shook his head at the offer of Huntley & Palmer's. Stephan said Ethel was coming in on the evening train. The R. N. O. looked down into the cup he was holding.

"Sudden change of plans, what?"

"Very sudden, sir. I had a telegram. . . . You never know where you are with women."

"Evidently not. You aren't getting out because of Ringthorne, are you? Because it isn't worth while."

"No, sir. I'd forgotten that, to tell you the truth. But he had it coming to him. Mrs. Callisthenes was very much upset."

"This place is so small."

"Some of the men here are too big," muttered Stephan, and the R. N. O., glancing at him, nodded. Stephan added that they ought to be moved round. They

were growing stale. Do some of them good to go and fight for their country.

"I'd like to do it myself, sir. It sounds potty, of course, but a man likes a decision one way or the other. You get to a decision. Here it's all indecisions . . . everything . . ."

"You shouldn't have brought your wife out if you're going home. You want a ship out here, though?"

"No choice, sir. It's going to sea I'd like. And if a scrap comes, all the better. I think she'd prefer to stay in Alexandria if she can't keep her job."

"Alex.?" The R. N. O. set down his cup and shook his head at the offer of more. Stephan misconstrued the negative.

"She could do lots of things in Alex.," he remarked. "Mrs. Callisthenes is going there. She's tired of Port Said."

Stephan wondered what the chief thought of Anastasia. Strange, in a way, he'd never . . . Well, no, the chief wouldn't take up with a girl. Lived in a glass house.

"You wouldn't object, sir, if Ethel—my wife—didn't want to go back to England? I don't think she'd want to. But I'll talk it over with her to-night."

The R. N. O. crossed his legs and studied the toe of his shoe.

"Alex.?" he repeated. "Or Malta? More healthy there. You'd probably be there yourself if they put you on a ship."

"Well, that's all right, sir. Ethel will appreciate the suggestion, of course. She . . ." he was about to say: she's always telling me to consult the R. N. O. He said,

rubbing his elbow: "She wouldn't care to go home; I do know that."

The R. N. O. looked again at the toe of his shoe. Then he rose, tall and austere. "Well, we don't want her to," he said looking for his cap.

"Thank you, sir. Very good of you to . . . It's a damn poor place for a girl. If you hadn't been . . ."

The R. N. O. nodded and passed out. Stephan looked after him in a glow. The chief was a wonderfully decent scout to work for. Very fine type! Stephan drank another cup of tea and called the servant.

"Kuckteels? Yessah," he replied to Stephan's order for cocktails at five-thirty.

"For four," Stephan added, and then, "No, for five." The man waited to get the final decision, the tray cutting his middle as he held it by one muscular grip.

"Yes, for five," said Stephan. He had thought it would be a rag to have Anastasia, as she was going away with him. He would send over a note.

It pleased him to send that by Mr. Yakoub. He spoke it out loud as he wrote.

"I want Mrs. Callisthenes to come over at five-fifteen," he said. "Take this note, will you? I'm taking her to the station."

He handed it over to the waiting Yakoub without glancing at him. He heard a voice, a hollow voice, from which all courage and ambition had been drained, remark that it would be necessary to attend next morning at the consul's office to have his passport visaed. The visa had to be countersigned by the consul at Alexandria and perhaps by the consular office in London—he did not know.

"You mean you have to get one for that—what's her name?—Ernestine? Well, that's all right. It won't take you all day."

"Many are going," said George Yakoub.

"Then be there at ten sharp. You ought to get attention. They know you."

Stephan thought: He's going a long way for a new start. Wonder why these chaps always want to wonder. They never get hold of anywhere. Always peddling and money-changing. No guts.

He asked himself, as he perused a ship's log Rigby shoved under his nose, whether he had guts himself. He couldn't find an adequate answer to that. It was like trying to hear the sound of your own voice. The extra stripe and the Croix de Guerre would come in handy in a case like that. They were evidence somebody else believed you had guts. It would make it easier to meet Ethel. Somehow, as he saw the coming clash with her to-night, as one sees statuary covered with sheeting, revealing only vague and crudely frightening outlines, he consoled himself with the reflection that the step in rank and the decoration, plus his decision to go to sea, would modify Ethel's sense of outrage. And she'd find Anastasia gone, so she would.

He pursued this practical theme. It all looked as if he were lucky. If she "made a scene," which she never had in her life, he would say he was going on leave. If she didn't he would . . . he would be as sporting as she was, that was all.

He realized he was going to meet an Ethel he didn't know. She had sat staring at *The Lady* in the train. Now, if she knew, what held her there in stony silence? Merely a decent objection to making a scene? Or did she glimpse

that her own attitude had brought it about? Perhaps she'd glimpsed that since and was hurrying back. All he had to do was "go slow" as he phrased it. Play up to her, but don't overplay. Because what he wanted, really, was not to get back to the Sefton Park basis again but to "strike a bargain." He'd admit what he'd done if he could thereby reach some understanding "so it wouldn't ever be necessary again." That sounded damned peremptory and he couldn't express it. It had to be understood, hinted at, to the new Ethel, the one who knew about him, yet was coming back.

As he cleared his desk he saw Rigby stand up and light a cigarette. The way Rigby pitched the match over the railing indicated a mind at ease, free from all the eroding torments which come from relations with women. Rigby vanished after office hours. He would be with his chums at the Eastern, enjoying a game of billiards or cards, or he would be on one of the ships in port, a guest of one of the officers, spending a pleasant evening. To Stephan life seemed a pretty simple affair for Rigby. Nothing to do but work at his job.

He said, jerking his thumb toward the stairway, which Mr. Yakoub was descending, "The dago tried to get the wind up with some yarn about my missus. He said you knew all about it."

Rigby turned with an easy roll and looked at Stephan.

"You've got to understand," went on Stephan, "my wife's been under a strain since that strafe in the town. And I simply shut the fellow up."

"Why, it's nothing," said Rigby. "I thought Mrs. Rumford had told you. We found Swaffham in your apartment, with a shot of this hashish stuff in him. While you were in Suez. It was as plain as the nose on your

face. He'd been carried in from the next flat. We couldn't say anything about it. I made it clear to Mrs. Rumford that we had no option. I took Swaffham along later. He was just about able to remember what had happened when we arrived. The flats are very much alike, and what defeated him was how we came to be there."

"I see. I see it now. I've been wondering why the chap didn't out with it. He would have, if Swaffham hadn't been brought down. That girl has had hold of him, you know."

"She's had hold of a lot of fellows in her time," said Rigby simply. There was in his tone a temperate knowledge of base life untouched by any bitterness. "They're all over the place," he added.

"She's only doing the best she can for herself, of course," said Stephan. "I had an interview with her at the police station. Just before the raid. She's had a kid and her own parents killed at Homs. So has this chap—Yakoub."

"How in hell do they know?" asked Rigby, looking round slowly.

"That's just what the navy is trying to find out. Ismailia, I believe. But it's in the *communiqués* the whole Syrian quarter is in ruins. They go by that. You can't blame 'em. If your people lived in Peckham, and Peckham was wiped out, you'd know all right, wouldn't you?"

"I suppose so," said Rigby, who had a mother and sisters in London and who had seen Zeppelins in the sky when he was on leave. "What's he going to do?"

"Wants a passport to Durban, where he'll open a store and live on nothing for a year or two. Wants to get away from a wife he's got in Alexandria who's in jail and who will be looking for him later."

Rigby, wise man, said nothing. Stephan looked at him for a moment. That was one of the secrets of his unclouded temperament—his easy acceptance of life. He didn't have to stick his nose into every heap of Levantine muck! Rigby went into the bathroom at the back, towel on arm and pink celluloid soap box in his huge hand. Stephan heard him blowing in there. He came out slipping a military comb into its sheath.

"Want to meet a lovely vamp?" asked Stephan as Rigby put on his helmet. Rigby gave his boss a look and shook his head.

"Not for me," he said. "Can't run to vamps on seventeen pound a month, income-tax deducted at source and a mother to keep. Glass of beer is more in my line, thanks all the same."

He went down the stairs clumpingly in his big black boots, which soiled the ends of his white trousers. Stephan thought: Why can't I be like him? Madame Ganón wouldn't hurt *him*. Nothing can hurt that kind of chap. Straight as a string. On the job. Well, am I not everlastingly on the job? Haven't I got an extra stripe and a Croix de Guerre? Golly, the chief ought to know how that happened! For remaining at his post under a hail of bombs. So I was! And anyhow the extra stripe is due after seven years in the service. But Rigby is—is—somehow he's more run-of-the-mill as they say. He couldn't get an extra-master's certificate if you offered him the crown jewels for a bribe. No, and he couldn't do the work I've done here either. He's one of those chaps who'll carry on, carry on, as they say! Yes, carry on after somebody else has thought up the scheme and organized it and set it going.

He thought: The real thing is, I'm done here. I'm stale

because the office runs itself. I want another problem to strafe. I want to be a watch keeper, to take orders, and to hell with all this hugger-mugger! I can't stop here. I'll go rotten, living with women . . . Greeks, Arabs, Jews, and all the rest of this crew. I wonder the chief stands it; but he does. Never lets us down!

He added: That's Anastasia!

He heard her quick light step and a rubber-soled patter. There was a clink in the kitchen as the servant prepared the "kuckteels," as he called them. Stephan stepped into the reception room out of sight. It suddenly occurred to him he must change his suit for the evening. He reached the bedroom before Anastasia and her Eleutherios arrived. He heard them pause and enter and the whispered order to sit down. He found himself thinking of that. The voice was calm, empty of emotion. He had never seen Anastasia make the slightest demonstration of affection toward her son. But Stephan had the sort of imagination that is born of racial antagonisms. He saw Eleutherios in five years time, the war ended, a rich anti-English gangling college youth, and watching his mother. Stephan had a vague notion that women never let much get between them and their only children for long. Ethel had said something one day about "that kid" coming into a lot of money one of these days. His father, the colonel, was a director of a munitions company, and his uncle was a banker in Brussels. The thought of that side of the case made him stare hard at himself in the glass as he changed. He wondered why these men, who had no brains in the sense he had them, could make so much more money. Then, after the war, why not try that game with MacTaggart and Ganón? And . . .

No, he couldn't formulate it. He looked hard at his own features, the bright pebbly eyes, the full pouting lips and strong jaw, the forehead full rounded, the pompadour of yellow hair brushed straight up like a clipped mane. What was he good for? he asked. He wanted to know. Why did the fierce flame in his heart turn black with smoke at times? All this blather about after the war! Even MacTaggart forgetting what he was here for. There might be, after the war, nothing. If we didn't win. The papers, especially that abominable *John Bull*, were all bellowng against the "side shows," as they called Port Said and Salonika. They might bring it about too, and in two shakes of a lamb's tail India would be cut off and Malta invested by the *Goeben* and *Hamidieh*. The whole war would fold up like a concertina, and we should be done for! To Stephan the set stern expression on the chief's face was a symbol of the risk everybody ran, east of Gibraltar. It was there; but you couldn't mention it to a soul.

He couldn't formulate it, that after-the-war scheme. It affronted him. He felt as though he were struggling, in his mind, over bundles of barbed difficulties, tearing his very entrails and vital organs as he strove to reach the safety of à mediocre mind. He had been carried away by a passion, and lo and behold he had an extra stripe and the Croix de Guerre promised. How to disentangle this in his mind?

And now the kid. He wanted one of his own. The craving for that had sometimes been independent of any particular mother, and he had been frightened at his own paganism, as he called it to himself. He had put it to MacTaggart once in general terms and asked: "What do you call it—just wanting a man-child?" MacTaggart

had been jocose: "The biological urge. That's the modern cant phrase for it," he had observed, with his precise Scot's intellectualism to the fore; and he had regarded Stephan with a sly smile. Stephan felt a queer affection for such a man. He had very little desire to use such expressions but he liked a man who could. And now the MacTaggart was "showing the kind of real stuff he had in him," as Stephan put it to himself. The Ganón business struck Stephan as sound. But—after the war! It was no use trying to plan it; no use dreaming about it, either.

Now the kid. It put Anastasia in a strange light, as though he saw her through a window from a distance, busy with maternal duties. It made a love affair seem no more than a secretive game, a sport; a hobby, if you liked to call it that. It was, with some men. A thin ray of light shot through Stephan's mind as he thought of Neirreddin Bey. It was a curious sensation—partly an intoxication of the senses, partly a twinge of cynicism—that assailed him when he remembered her magical skill in evoking the male in him. . . .

He turned to the chest of drawers to find a fresh suit. It was the first time in his life he had ever . . . What a kid she thought him! Delight, delight! Thoughts blurred in his brain now. This was all a fantasy of life, a performance like those Greek mysteries MacTaggart had spoken of, orgiastic ceremonials where men and women . . . Stephan remembered that. Greek! Anastasia was a Greek, so she was! She was a mistress of those arts. And she was also a demure mother of a dark-skinned brat with great black eyes. There would always be Eleutherios staring at him with those unwinking pools of ink, and turning away, without any recognition, to his mother,

who would gaze down upon him with that enigmatic air of contemplating for the first time the problem of existence. They would converse in low tones, in Greek. Eleutherios never romped or shouted. On the beach, in a diminutive fiery red bathing suit, he would run a few steps and stop short, regarding the ocean as though it too were English and he couldn't understand what it was saying. Always Master Eleutherios, Stephan said to himself briskly, buttoning the tunic and taking up the hair brushes. Ethel had given them to him a long while ago, when he was third watch keeper on the *Carmania.* Ivory with initials in silver. That was before the little dago, as Ethel called him, had been born. . . . Now a handkerchief. They too had been bought and hemmed and initialled by Ethel. Two dozen; he had nearly all of them still. Fine Irish linen, like her own things. He looked at the clock by the bed—five-fifteen.

"I'm coming—coming," he called to a faint signal from Anastasia. "What is it?" he demanded as the sibilant sounds persisted.

"Somebody come, I hear zem," she said, close to the door. That, he reflected, was why she didn't come in. That, or the kid. Yes, the kid made a difference. He took another look at himself. He was all right.

He came into the reception room as MacTaggart was bowing to Anastasia. Mr. and Mrs. Ganón were at the door. The servant entered with his "kuckteels," a tall shaker and five silver goblets. MacTaggart made the introductions.

Stephan, looking at the subdued Anastasia in her alpaca travelling suit, smart yet dowdy, and Eleutherios carrying his own little yellow dust coat for the journey, smiled. They had a droll appearance, to his mind. Euro-

peans travelling always were funny, he thought. They didn't know much. Also Eleutherios was appalling in smoked glasses. Mrs. Ganón, on the other hand, was what MacTaggart had called rather striking. Moreover, she had a curious habit of conducting a monologue in French in an almost inaudible undertone for the benefit of Mr. Ganón. She expressed her opinions of the apartment, the rug, the furniture, the glimpse into the bedroom, the heat, the lack of fans, and the proximity to the screeching on the Canal. Also she alluded to the mistress of Neirreddin Bey being present and why? Meanwhile she bowed, said it was *très chaud*, accepted a chair and a "kuckteel" with a *merci beaucoup, Monsieur*. She regarded Stephan with candid curiosity over the rim of the goblet while MacTaggart spoke of conditions after the cessation of hostilities; and when would it be? murmured Madame Ganón in French to her husband, and why disturb oneself?

Her husband told her they were discussing business. He went on to say he wished, after the war, to get the agency for a number of American proprietary articles, especially machinery and agricultural implements. He believed there would be a big business in that sort of thing all along North Africa. Not enough to ship direct, but to tranship from Alexandria in a small vessel under the Egyptian flag, eh? A small chartered steamer, like that one out there in the Canal, the *Alceste*.

"Why not buy one?" said Stephan, setting down his drink and looking at his wrist watch. He then glanced at Anastasia and nodded. They would have to move soon. Mr. Ganón shook his finger in front of his large fleshy nose.

"Long-term charter," he growled. "Then if freights

go up you are safe. Ships are—" he looked at the other two men in succession "—good for shipowners."

Stephan thought: He's afraid of the running expenses, and you can't blame him. And the combines after the war! He said: "It might even pay to leave it all to the shipowners. There'll be competition."

"Not on the coast," said Mr. Ganón. "We can get good freights from these ports to Alexandria."

"Well, wait till I come back," Stephan said. "We're going to the station. Help yourselves. Mac, call the boy if you want anything." Stephan took a caviare sandwich and reached for his cap. Madame Ganón watched him with interest. Something in his quick vital movements, his arrogant tread, took her fancy. At one moment she ran her bright shadowless glance over *la maîtresse de Neirreddin Bey. Hein!* So that was it? she murmured voicelessly as she glimpsed something. She turned her head as Stephan looked back into the room:

"You'll all dine with me, of course."

As he helped them into the carriage, he thought: I'll say I have to come back quick. That'll let me out of standing and waving and all that rot. In any case . . .

Anastasia was enigmatic. She bent her eyes on Eleutherios. She nodded when Stephan asked her if the luggage had gone to the station. He leaned over and patted the boy's shoulder. Eleutherios gazed interrogatively at his mother. Stephan found he couldn't talk while the kid sat there in front of them. The expression on the boy's face made it impossible to look at Anastasia. Stephan sat staring at the shining brass knob on the carriage lamp. It sent him off into a trance of anticipations. His servant had made those "kuckteels" strong, by jingo! He saw the evening with extraordinary clarity. It was a clever

move of his to keep those people to dinner. It would make it easier for Ethel. She could change while they had another drink. He himself would not have another. It was funny how he would get dizzy for a while. Alcohol on an empty stomach. Made him light-headed, and that brass knob made him even more so. He roused.

"You'll want to get your tickets. I must see to that. I have to get back to those people . . ."

He thought: Where's it gone? Looks as if a man's mind can break a piece off and it can fly out into space—or time. Theory of moons in the text book! Moon-struck, then! But it's gone, that—that don't-care-a-damn feeling. Now she's holding the kid—that's to show she's independent. Well, her husband gives her the money to buy those tickets to Alex., which makes me out a funny sort of swine when you come to look at it. One way to serve your king and country! And she agreed! The don't-care-a-damn feeling again. That part of me . . . that part of me is broken off, flown away into next week, into Alex. on leave. They assume orbits of their own, the old lecturer used to say, round the central planet. A man's mind is like that. . . . I mustn't look at that brass knob any more. Here's the sports ground. Look at the little Gyppies playing football with two goats for goal posts! And getting penalized for being off-side, by Jove!

He heard Anastasia's voice near him.

"I stop in Cairo one day, per'aps two. When will you come to Alexandrie?"

"I can't be sure. The chief says to suit myself, but I must stay till some ships . . . you understand."

"You will come soon?"

"Of course. I need a rest and change."

Fondly, Ethel. So the wire had been signed. Fondly, eh? Language is the art of concealing your thoughts, MacTaggart said. "Disguising" was a better word than "concealing." But "fondly" told him exactly how Ethel felt. What she thought didn't matter. You could bank on that. Ethel never concealed her thoughts. There was something very English about her when she was absent. She gave you the impression of being consecrated to a sort of Protestant secular sisterhood. . . .

Told him how she felt. The train was rambling now along the shore of Lake Menzaleh. She was getting her things together in the first-class compartment. She'd have done some shopping, he would bet. She had her own money for that. He never even asked her about it. She got value too. The things in the house lasted.

Lasted for what? He needed a rest and a change. First of all, though, here was the station, dusty and dry and very uninviting. Colonel Ringthorne, an eye shade very conspicuous, was going up the line. Good place for him. But where was it gone? Perhaps that had just been a bit of old-fashioned chivalry. In the old days a gentleman defended a lady anyhow. . . . Here we are. Now about the tickets. He lifted Eleutherios to the ground, paid the cabman, and towed the kid toward the *bureau des billets.* They must look a regular family party. Colonel Ringthorne in his reserved first-class compartment would get a flea in his ear when he saw them.

He waited while she presented her passport and got the tickets. So she had an official pass as well. Of course Colonel Callisthenes would wangle one in London. As she raised her eyes from her purse she smiled comprehension of his mood.

"You are good to come wiz me," she said in a low tone. "You go now?"

"Soon," he said. "How about luggage?" He was suddenly light-hearted. He wanted to get back to work, to his job. What a hell of a life to be on the stretch all the time! It would be good having those people at dinner. The conversation would be general, secular, without passion. Even if the end of the war never came, a man needed healthy diversion. Back of all this in his mind, like sunrise behind the mountains, was his coming freedom on a ship's bridge. The pleasant bonds of discipline! Naval officers were not a band of brothers ashore. They were more like a lot of mongrels growling round a couple of thoroughbreds.

He went to see if her luggage was in. All right. Well . . .

She said, "Zat man is in ze train."

"Well, what of it? He won't bother you again. He's getting out at El Kantara. Going east. Now you've got everything?"

"You——" she began, unable to express the shadow she felt.

"That's all right. I'll be going on leave. I'll—I'll let you know. Let me lift him." He took Eleutherios and hoisted him on the train. "Now you." He took her arm and she stepped up. He stood back and saluted. She gazed down at him, smiling, shaking her head slightly in a questioning way, and then pressing her hand to her bosom, thrust the boy forward and went into the car.

Stephan had a sense of something over and done with, a danger, a very great danger, sweeping past him into limbo. As though he had been carried off a ship on a

giant wave and had found himself suddenly on deck again, dizzy but safe.

You're a frightful cad all the same, he told himself. He wondered whether all men had this extraordinary anxiety to get clear of a woman, to escape the invisible threads which they are eternally spinning. There was Rigby, with a fresh pink complexion, stout muscular frame and all his faculties and appetites apparently under wholesome control: Didn't he ever feel a cad in his heart? Did he, on the other hand, feel heroic vibrations shaking his very soul? Or the chief, who was so perfectly a cog in the naval mechanism, had he never . . .? Or MacTaggart, with his poems about "Coptic maidens dreaming in a sphinx's shade, while Astarté's moon is gleaming on a Theban blade"? Rumpty tumpty tum! He, Stephan, couldn't bear poetry: it made him sick, but he remembered everything he heard or read. Once he had heard something not intended for him at all. That young squirt Morris, in the air squadron, had been singing one of his songs on a balcony below Stephan when he lived in the Marina. It was called "If the Admiral Came to Port Said." Each verse guyed somebody. And there had been one which went with a vicious gallop:

The only times he's ever afloat
Is when he goes out in a motor-boat
And he'd go to Cairo and cut his throat
If the Admiral came to Port Said!

Stephan hadn't minded that. It made him one of the bosses, who were feared and respected and lampooned. Nonentities were never lampooned.

Now, in the dusk, he walked to and fro, acknowledging salutes and listening to the dry hacking cough of the

approaching train. Ethel. He remembered suddenly the package which had just come from Cassar and Mifsud for her. She could find it herself after she'd said what she had to say about—conduct unbecoming a husband. That would be an official way of describing it. Fondly! A woman could be fond of a man and flay him. The only trouble was: he wasn't in a penitent mood. Nobody else in the world knew what had happened to him, but he knew Ethel would sense it in a second.

Fondly she would flay him! He saluted in reply to a great blocky Australian private—no, New Zealand possibly, with a strip of leopard fur round his wide hat. Waiting for his officer. Australians didn't salute! They seemed to live in sort of internecine hell with their officers. More than once Port Said people had prayed to have them taken away. New Zealanders seemed to be civilized, at any rate. Stephan watched the lights of the train coming in. That cocktail had spent itself. He was all right now. He didn't want Ethel to take a quick second glance, over her shoulder, at his eyes and then dry up, as she sometimes did. She was not bigoted about a fellow being elevated, but she would always wait until later to say what she had been going to say. Now he was all right. He was going to sea anyhow, his job was running well, he was going to have an extra stripe—Lieutenant Commander, no less—and he was a frightful cad. If you did the right thing you became a cad. If you persisted in defying the right you were a cad just the same. As the train ground in, hissing and squealing, he thought to himself: Well, you have to make out as well as you can. You have to trust somebody in this world. Somebody who will take the trouble to keep you straight. . . .

He struggled with this thought as he walked smartly

along the train, watching the passengers at the windows. He had a sudden perception of himself, locked out of his own heart's sanctuary, until Ethel could find the key. Then he caught sight of her, in a new broad-brimmed hat, a new white serge travelling suit, and a long string of big amber beads. A red leather handbag hung on her arm, and a small valise, which he had given her for a birthday present, was turned toward him as she addressed an Arab porter. He saw the initials: E. R. in black Roman type. And then she saw him and her eyes became critically, absurdly bright. She did not smile. Her face softened. In the crowd of people surging on the platform no one was observing the reception she accorded her husband. She gave the porter the valise and held up her hand to wave to Stephan. He hurried toward her. He thought: What's this? She's glad to be back!

He said: "Well, dear?" and watched the porter bringing out her big basket valise. "That all? I have a cab."

In the cab, driving through the sand toward the town, he wondered for an instant what was in the wind, but he felt pleased none the less. She would not meet his eye; but meeting his eye was nothing. It was not her way to stare at him. She generally spoke while downward-glancing at hand or foot or knee. He was surprised to discover her hand seeking his, leaving in it a hard small package.

"I brought you a present from Cairo," she said lightly. "I was shopping."

"No need," he said, looking at the thing—a white parcel with red twine. "There's one for you at the house. No, not from me. Cassar and Mifsud of the *Alceste*. I wouldn't take anything and——"

"Stephan," she broke in, looking at the dim lights of distant doors. "I've something I must tell you."

"Not here," he said. "I'm not going to argue in a gharry. Won't it wait?"

She did not reply "yes" or "no" but leaned forward, looking out.

"I'm awfully glad I came back."

"So am I. It was just what I wanted, as a matter of fact. Wasn't so keen on your going away."

"Why? Because I was furious?"

"Partly, yes. I was furious too. And I was . . . Well, what of it? I'll tell you everything. Not now. We've some people to dinner. They're drinking cocktails and waiting for us now. MacTaggart's friends. Man we're going into business with after the war, and his wife. You should see her. Mac calls her very striking."

"Mac going into business too?"

"After the war, mind you. In the meantime we go on with the war. Did you see the chief in Cairo?"

"Stephan! What made you ask me that?"

"Why shouldn't I? He's just back. He had tea this afternoon. I told him I wanted a job on a ship, and he's put through my application for a transfer. You can live in Alexandria."

"Who are these people for dinner?"

"Mr. and Mrs. Ganón. He sold his business to the Khedivial Cold Storage people. Mac thinks he's all right."

"Why didn't you invite Mrs. Callisthenes?"

"She isn't here. She's gone to Alexandria, I believe. She was upset the other night. Some bounder insulted her at the Continental dance. Drunk of course. Anyhow she's gone off with the kid to Alexandria."

He thought: God bless my soul! Every word of that is true and I am telling it. He heard Ethel laugh.

"Oh, she isn't so easy to insult. I think sometimes she'd *like* to have an adventure."

He listened in the darkness under the hood of the carriage. Ethel couldn't have said that! Not if she suspected him, surely!

He said: "That's a bit cattish, isn't it? She's always seemed rather decent."

"Oh, she is! But she's had no chance to be anything else in a place like this. I'm not trying to be cattish, Stephan. I couldn't! It's of no importance to me what she does. But she told me herself she had a friend in Cairo. I forget the name."

"Platonic?"

"Greek women don't know what you mean by platonic. There's no such thing, in my opinion. Where there's smoke you'll find a fire. I didn't want her confidences. Please change the subject. How's the office?"

"All right. Yakoub has applied for discharge. I think Rigby would like to stay on. And of course Bannister has sailed. Sent his duty to you."

She gave a faint chuckle of laughter, a sign of extraordinary well-being for her. Her usual rare laugh was the most mirthless thing in the world. Now she was happy.

"A jolly decent old chap! I'm awfully glad to be back, Stephan. . . . Did the—the R. N. O. recommend a change, dear?"

"Of course he didn't. Catch him recommend anybody shifting. But he knows I'm fed up. And the office runs all right now. I told him you didn't want to go home. So he said Alexandria, or Malta. Malta's nice."

"Yes, Malta's nice. At Sliema. Better than Alexandria. If you are on a ship it *would* be better."

He thought: She's willing. Please change the subject. Delighted, I'm sure, in this particular case!

"You mean it will be better for me to be on a ship?" he asked.

"Stephan, you are horrid!"

She hadn't, he reflected, called him horrid in that tone for months. He knew what it meant.

"You'd like it at Sliema?"

"Oh, immensely. The climate, and the general social life is *heaps* better than Egypt. If you are going into business here after the war I'm sure I don't want to be here for the duration."

"Rather not. Will you be long? Shall I say you'll be twenty minutes dressing for dinner? We can go on and I'll come back for you."

"Will you really? Thanks, dear. Why do you really want to go to sea?"

"To get my bearings. I'm not like you. I lose my bearings."

She put out her hand. "I think everybody loses their bearings in a place like this," she said.

"I want to have a cut at the active service," he went on. "I'm getting a medal for sitting in my bally office!"

"Everybody else ran out or got away," she said in a steady undertone. "I don't see why you should feel any hesitation about that. You know how that old Captain Jones got a Croix de Guerre for taking his ship to Gaza and back. You've jolly well deserved all you've had, I think. Here's the gate."

He leaped out, his eyes shining, and dragged at the luggage. He thought: This is luck! This is fisherman's luck! Of course I don't deserve it. He paid the cabman and called the Arab watchman with his huge knobbed

club, like a wooden mace. Then he took Ethel's arm and felt a thrill responding in it to his hand. Once he was aware of her half-turning to him in the dusk, as though to say something. But he was no longer afraid. Whatever it might be it wasn't *that!* He thought of Malta, Sliema across the blue Marsamuscetto Harbour, and the deck of a slim gray man-o'-war.

As they entered the room, MacTaggart and Mr. Ganón rose and Mrs. Ganón turned her bright unshadowed gaze upon the Englishwoman in approval. She told her husband that Madame was excellent, very *Anglaise*, but with *ton*. That she was a friend of the friend of Neirreddin Bey was *drôle*. She watched her excuse herself from a cocktail and go into the bedroom.

Stephan found her holding a bar pin that flashed in the light by the dressing table. He carried a vermouth to her. She never took spirits.

"From Cassar and Mifsud," he told her. "It's very spiffing. I shouldn't say where you got it."

"But can they afford it?" she asked. "Why, it must have cost a hundred pounds."

"Can they afford it?" he mocked. "They're making . . . What on earth is that?"

"Stephan!" she cried, as the building rocked before an onslaught of stupendous explosions. The lights went out. There was a shriek from Madame Ganón and a tinkle of glass. Stephan had dropped the vermouth and snatched at Ethel. Was the house coming down? What the devil were they doing, for God's sake? He rushed through with her before him, following the others upon the balcony, where a vast glare illuminated the harbour. MacTaggart turned to him, showing an extraordinary excitement.

"It's your *Alceste*," he shouted, above a huge droning roar. "Blown up! On fire! Look at her!"

Stephan looked, even as he thrust Ethel over to MacTaggart. He forced his chin down against his breast; his eyes became hard and bright, like pebbles; his lips were pouted. He could not hold back a slight smile.

He thought: *Now* will they believe me! And I hound people, don't I, eh? I hold up respectable Arabs and have them thrown off ships. And now look at her. That's foul play, I'll bet my bloody neck!

He shouted in MacTaggart's ear: "Got to go down. Take care of . . . You understand! Dangerous, this. I'll come back. Wait!"

He found Hassan, excited, gesticulating to his friends. Stephan waved him into the launch. "Navy House," he shouted. "Get her going."

The *Alceste* had exploded under the fore-deck. Forward she was an open furnace from which came that monstrous roaring as the cans of petrol melted and fed the dense volume of flame. Men were clustered on the poop and uncoiling ropes, down which they slid into boats and into the water. One was crawling backward down the hawser to the buoy. As he looked Stephan saw the reflection of the flames in the chart house window splinter and vanish when the glass broke in the heat, and the white paint of the bridge blackened and split.

He thought: She's gone. They couldn't even move her now; anchor's down. And she's in the fairway. And by God, if the plates give and the stuff spreads it'll be all over the harbour. And the *Goeben!* She can be seen for fifty miles!

He wrestled in his mind what might be done. As the launch approached her he suddenly steered across her

bows and passed a couple of bodies, face downward, floating in a scum of oil and blood. The wash of the launch set them moving, as though they had been suddenly endowed with a dreadful vitality. They seemed to be engaged in agonized supplications. Already the thin strakes of the *Alceste* above his head were reddening between the frames and stringers. The gangway was crackling and dropping sparks. Hassan, crouching over his engine, looked stern as he glanced back at the floating corpses. The rail and upper plating by the bridge was bulged outward. Stephan pressed one hand over the other on the tiller. Just by a ventilator, he told himself. He had been too late seeing that swine Farag. Ibrahim Farag! Ah, you could do something with Syrians and Greeks and Armenians and Turks, but the Arabs were a sort of human fungus, verminous eaters of carrion! Kill their own flesh and blood for a fanatical illusion. Bek'ahri Bey had told him of the *jehad* started in Suakin against the Feringhee. The quarters amidships were afire now. The bunkers below would melt the ship in half once they were alight. Couldn't we sink her with a depth charge?

He drove straight at Navy House, where he saw the R. N. O. and some others standing. He was giving them orders. Stephan stepped out as they saluted hurriedly and made for a high-powered air-base launch. It roared away into the dark. Stephan saluted. The chief nodded, his eyes on the *Alceste*. He did not speak. Stephan understood that. It was the French who had to handle this.

On the edge of the glare a launch floated full of bearded French naval officers. Stephan wondered what they proposed to do? Hoist their epaulettes and spread out their hands, no doubt. He took a turn of a step or two, waiting

to be addressed. He felt his heart burning within him. Salonika would get no petrol. Someone was at the bottom of this. Sir Spencer, in Cairo, when they tell him of it, will say: "Don't bother me," in a faint expiring voice. A bureaucratic hell, Mac said. That would be cold, not hot. There would be an inquiry over this. Verdict: person or persons unknown. Mister Farag, the Arab familiar of a certain naval person, who shall be nameless, owing to his weakness for hashish, would bring about five hundred unwashed Arabians to prove he was in their quarter when the ship blew up.

Tugs puffed into view towing strings of dark shapes like logs. They were going to encircle the *Alceste* with those things to hold back the outpouring oil and spirit. Already ships were moving out. General order to go up to Ismailia. Bluejackets hurried off in squads to bring officers back from the hotels to their ships. Liberty launches, loaded heavily, chugged through water red as blood and on into darkness. All leave stopped. Raise steam immediately. The signals were being morsed from the top of Navy House to all ships. Stephan saw one transport frantically winking a reply. Her boilers were opened for cleaning. They would be! Catch those chaps ever thinking an order (to have steam in one boiler) was intended to be obeyed.

As he waited—he had wanted to suggest to the chief towing the *Alceste* out beyond the hospital—he saw the flames burst out at the after end of the bridge deck, the alleyway acting as a flue. The teak door had burned away. Heavy black coils of smoke belched from cabin ventilators under the boats. A forward boat, with its falls burned away, fell against the rail. The foremast leaned slightly, for the foot of it was in the hottest part

of the hold. Stephan imagined the solder pouring from the tins and the tins themselves falling open like wet envelopes, the petrol booming and exploding and glowing as it ran to augment the pool of flame. Soon the mast would go over.

The sudden burst of flame on the after deck showed him the gun. Merciful God in heaven! He whirled on the man standing there in his white suit, face austere, imperturbable. Stephan cried:

"Sir, the ammunition!"

"What about it?"

"Get it out! There's hundreds——"

"Exactly. The French——"

"I'll get it out. Sir, call for volunteers. I'll go. I'll send the launch back." Stephan walked backward, saluting.

He turned and ran down to the steps and landed in the launch with a single jump. Hassan looked at him in alarm.

"Go on," Hassan heard an exultant voice order him, "go to that rope at the stern. Quick now! Get a move on you!"

Stephan kept his eye on the rope and steered for it. Hassan kept looking over his shoulder at the brilliantly lighted buildings. The heat became stronger. The extraordinary multiplicity of accumulating detonations inside the glowing hull suddenly daunted the little man crouched over his engine. He put his arms over his face and fell against the thwart.

"Way 'nuff!" yelled Stephan, putting her over. "Go back now! Go back to——" He flung himself on the rope and began to swarm up it.

The world became pandemonium to him. As he climbed, the rope turned and he saw the shore lined with watchers. He saw them running from the Canal Building, whose domes were like blood-slashed turquoise in the conflagration. Beyond the great roaring of the fire he saw them and did not see them as the rope twisted. He pulled himself up vigorously, yet it seemed a long way. He thought: God! Nelson did this; with one arm he did it. He was no weight, though. Why don't they send off? Now, again, and I'll make it!

For a moment he swung, trying to get his grip on the poop hawse-pipe whence the rope dangled. His body yawed under the counter. Then he got it, and pulled himself to the coaming and over. Old-fashioned ship this, he thought. Now up on the gun place.

He tore off his tunic and flung it aside, thinking of that old rigmarole: *The boy stood on the burning deck.* At school they used to add: *with a string of sausages round his neck and an onion on his head!* Nothing sacred! Here's the stuff. He laid hold of a case of cartridges and began to drag it to the after end of the quarter-deck house. He took a deep breath and measured the size of the job.

Most of it was down through the booby-hatch. He had to get it out. But first he would clear the deck. He was bothered by the smoke coming down-wind on him, making his eyes smart and rasping his throat. The shell-cases were heavy. He hauled as fast as he could. Unhooking the hand rails aft he trundled the cases one after another over the coaming. A tug whistled in a deep note that flared up into a shrill whoop. He could not see her. They had gone to windward to tow the round black booms

into place. Stephan thought of them with impatience. They never realized what would happen to the whole port if she sank with the ammunition on board and blew up under water. But they didn't know, as he did, that the French were putting all this on board to get it to Salonique without sending another ship. He toiled and sweated. The smoke had blackened his face and arms. He tore off the sleeves of his shirt and wiped his face with them. There was an anchor on his forearm in blue with a red "E" under it. He dragged the last of the cases from the deck and sent it over the end, splash. Now for the hatch. He raised it.

A great lightness of spirit took possession of him. They would be here presently, he thought. Lieutenant Commander Stephan Rumford, R. N. R., Croix de Guerre, in command of the salvage party. The chief would see he got due credit. He slid down the ladder into the deck house and looked round for a rope. What luck! There lay a coil of good two-inch coir—just the thing. He ran it through the lifts of a shell case and climbed to the deck. He heaved with all his might, his short muscular legs taut as stanchions, his breath coming quick and fast. The case thumped on deck and as he rushed along aft with it he gave a short shout of satisfaction. He began to sing:

Oh, Johnny's gone to Liverpool!
To Liverpool, that Yankee school
A-way—you
Hee—lo—a!

"Oh, Johnny's gone to Callao!
Those Spanish gals he'll see . . .
Hee—lo—a!"

He thought, down in the sinister-smelling chamber under the gun: There's a lot of stuff here, I ought to have help. *Oh, Johnny's gone to Baltimore!* Help! What do they think I'm doing—trying to run away with her?

He was up on deck again, laughing, hauling desperately. As he stumbled along through the hot smoke that was illuminated by the roaring flames of the fore deck he resembled a madman saving a chest of treasure from one element to consign it to another. Through the smoke he saw boats standing off, men waving to him. They seemed to be waving slowly because of the speed of his thoughts. He exulted now that he was on his own. For the first time he was out of the bonds of discipline. He had suddenly snatched the reins of his destiny from that tall silent man whom he loved and worshipped at the same instant. He saw the duty like a star. There was no time for discussion. There ought to be a medal for discussion, he thought, a medal made of putty and suspended from a ribbon of red-tape. For the Lords of the Conference Table! . . . He was down in the chamber again. Chamber of Horrors . . . he remembered with great clearness the Marylebone Road, where they arrived on a horse-bus, to see the Chamber of Horrors at Madame Tussaud's. The Guillotine—a truly French invention—waxwork effigies of Charlie Peace and Mrs. Maybrick. Even now the word "effigy" called up a Frenchwoman with a dagger in her bosom. The French! God gave them dominion over the land, the English over the sea. That didn't justify them in winking at Neirreddin Bey and . . . up again! They were waving to him. Long may they wave! Why not come on up and help get the stuff out of the ship. She's gone, but Port Said will

go too if we let all this go pop. He was over the stern again and saw another case go plunging. He laughed.

He was happy. Down among the cases he thought: When I get ashore I want a bath, a drink, and a good dinner. Aha, and so to bed, as Mac's always quoting some old Johnny. Pips, is it? . . . Peps, that's it, Peps. Said he was secretary to the navy. So to bed . . . well, it sounds like us. Heave—oh! God almighty, it's that hot now! They ought to break out her anchor and let her swing in the wind, to save the after hold. I wonder if anybody is coming up that rope. Isn't there anybody with guts on the deck?

"Oh, the boy stood on the burning deck
With a string of sausages round his neck
And an onion on his head!"

Have to give that to Morris. He can make up a chanty for the Air Force out of it. The two-pip pinhead, with his teeny-weeny moustache! Looks as if he ought to wipe his little nosey! *Ah-tchoo!* He drew a blackened sweaty wrist across his face. And so to bed, eh? My lord discovered a great love for his ship! Mac must have read a million books. And I've read hell an 'all. Ethel and I read *The Broad Highway* while we honeymooned. Well, half of it. A Tinker and so forth. She brought it back and put it away. I bet I get it out to-night and give it to her. *The Broad Highway,* Tinkers in a dell. He sang suddenly as he hauled:

"Down in the dell where the buttercups grow
All in gray, all in gray
I found her in the hay
Down in the dell where the buttercups grow!"

Ha! the case barked his shin and he stooped to reach the rope handles. What a curse a memory is! They say a drowning man sees . . . I bet it's all birilla and blethers. But it must be fifteen years since I heard that. The senior apprentice on the *Scottish Hills* sang it. Every smutty verse he sang until we threw sea-boots at him . . .

"All in gray, all in gray,
I had five bob to pay . . ."

Over she goes! . . .

"Down in the dell where the buttercups grow!"

He straightened and took a long look, eyes closed to a slit, toward the midship section. The smoke was pouring out of the engine-room scuttle. Coal and oil were burning now. Suddenly he felt a gentle movement. He saw the deck slope before his eyes. Now what's that? Ah! she's sinking forward. She's caved in and filling. Now I've got to haul up-hill. And the rope is . . .

He seemed to be shouting at someone in the hatch.

It's not a bit of use arguing! he said. *Not a bit of use.* He took up his white tunic and drew it over his face like a towel, leaving a wet black smudge. He leaned back against the gun for a moment, breathing heavily. Now he saw the shore, the tug thumping with its string of booms. It seemed ages since he had climbed up. Seven, eight, now nine cases. Down again! *Not a bit of use, I tell you!* he shouted. *Here's a job! My first command! I suppose you can call it a command when you've got a master's ticket and you're in sole charge of the ship! You can call it that if it's any satisfaction. Pity the crew don't join, though!*

He came up the ladder slowly, the rope over his shoulder. He was facing forward and the hot blast of the fire burning in the alleyways amidships, with sparks from the teak doors and pine bulkheads, met him full on. He struggled to get out and turn round. He had to lay the rope down for a moment and go abaft the gun. The wood smoke choked him. Swirling in eddies and lit by that everlasting roar, it enveloped the poop. He heard shrill horns from motor boats and hoarse squeals from tugs. The shore appeared suddenly for a moment and was obscured. He saw them. Crowds lined the quays and the high gun platforms of trawlers. He looked down on them now as the *Alceste's* bows folded like the knees of a beast beneath her, softened in the white-hot furnace. He stooped and made a run for the rope and began to haul. He heard voices near by and panted desperately.

He thought: Can't you come up, as I did? Nelson came up one-armed, his cutlass in his teeth. He rushed the case aft and sent it flying. He looked down in afterthought. No, didn't hit them. Might have. . . . And they're going away! He saw a launch roaring off in a curve, to the shore. He stood, his eyes bright in sooty sockets, his face and clothes black and scorched, smiling. What? They've quit? Funked it? He ran over to the dangling rope by which he had climbed. Oho! He sprang up and unbent it from the bollards, lowering the fall to the water. It had risen beyond the reach of men in boots as the *Alceste* sank by the head. Stephan made it fast and stumbled. Gone to get a boarding ladder. Gone to get a lot of tools! Oh, my word! It's too hot here for . . . Well, there's nearly half of it over. Down again, my boy!

He thought: Cremation: most of them working down

there forward must have been caught. That Farag! Probably looking on now, in a crowd of the swine. He took the steps again to face the hot deck. Up she comes. As he dragged it aft a wave of exasperation swept over him. I suppose I ought to have seen them coming. I ought to have known the rope would be too high now. Well, I didn't. I can't think of everything. They'll be Lord knows how long finding a ladder. Why don't they come back? They're coming back, with a crowd of marines. Hooray for the Ball and Laurel! He began to hum a tune he was making up:

" 'E isn't one of the regular line
And 'e isn't one o' the crew—
'E's a sort o' giddy harumphrodite
Soldier and sailor too."

And look at the gas-masks! Wish I had one. Now why don't they hurry and start? He watched the launch at the distant pier as the smoke cleared, and suddenly he felt faint. This won't do, he said crossly. They're coming. They'll find the job done. Down again, my hearties. He sang:

"Now who will spike those guns with me?
Why bless you, sir, come along say we!
Cheerily, my lads, yo-ho!"

He turned toward the shore as it showed again across water darkly bright.

So they saw him, a truculent stocky figure, arms akimbo, blackened and undefeated, before the after deck of the *Alceste* rose up in a vast plume of flame and they fell back before the thunder of the explosion. They saw

the reddened strakes fold in and crumple beneath the collapsing decks. The high poop sides nodded and slewed forward, vomiting dark smoke from a jagged empty chamber. The glare went out suddenly, and Port Said vanished into the darkness as the *Alceste* rolled over.

THE END

SALON
GREECE
CR

TINOPLE
BERLIN-BAGDAD RY
ALEXANDRETTA
TO BAGDA
ALEPPO
CYPRUS
HOMS
BEIRUT
DAMASCUS
JERUSALEM
PORT SAID
GAZA
ISMÄILIYA
SUEZ CANAL
CAIRO
SUEZ
NILE